

THE
DUTY OF PASTORS,

PARTICULARLY RESPECTING THE LORD'S SUPPER;

A SYNOD SERMON.

To which is added,

A DIALOGUE,

ON THE DUTY OF FREQUENT COMMUNICATING, &c.

WITH ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS MADE TO THAT PRIMITIVE
PRACTICE.

By N. DOUGLAS,

DUNDEE.

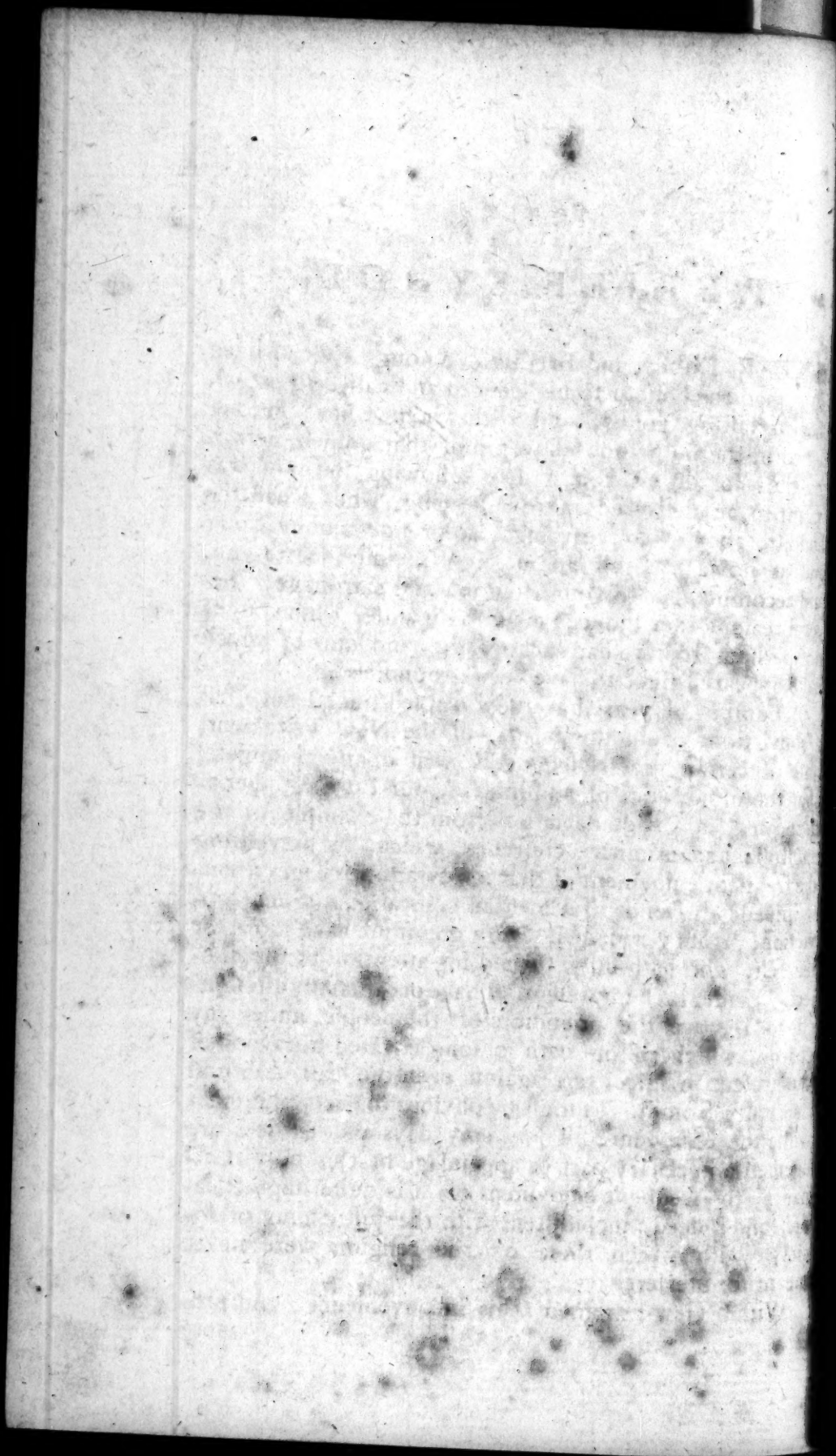
*Great men are not always wise; neither do the aged understand judgment.
Therefore I said, Harken to me; I also will shew mine opinion. To
the Law and to the Testimony Search the Scriptures Teaching them
to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. Those things
which ye have both learned and received, and heard and seen in me, do.
I charge thee before God that thou observe these things.*

Dundee,

PRINTED BY T. COLVILL FOR THE AUTHOR.

1796.

(PRICE SIXPENCE.)



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TO THE
RELIEF SYNOD.

DEAR Fathers and Brethren, among whom I have had the honour to be licenced and called to preach the everlasting gospel, and with whom I have so long joined in the faith and fellowship of that gospel, permit me thus to address you. The following Sermon was meant to be delivered in your hearing, when I had the honour, above two years ago. to preside among you; and is now, with all due deference, inscribed to you, and recommended to your attention and patronage. Several reasons then induced me to lay it aside, which ought not perhaps to have had such weight, and some of which have appeared since to have been groundless.

A number of years have now elapsed since I have felt a conviction. from the perusal of the New Testament, and of certain tracts designedly writ upon the subject, that the usual mode of administering our Lord's supper among us, is a wide deviation from the example of the apostolic and primitive churches, which, by preventing the frequent enjoyment of that important privilege, greatly impedes the ends of Christian edification. Such conviction, I am persuaded, every one must have more or less felt, who hath duly turned his attention to the subject. Under such impression, I have occasionally attempted to remove the prejudices of the people under my charge, which custom hath so long rivetted in favour of the present practice, and against even the least scriptural departure from it. It must be obvious to every one, that while the observance of so many days and services are deemed a necessary part or appendage of this holy ordinance, the frequent enjoyment of it is quite impracticable, and indeed, inconsistent with the just claims of society, with which those of true religion were never meant to interfere.

With a view to remedy this inconvenience, and promote

mote the benefit of the real members of Christ, I have often conversed with Brethren on the mode of dispensing it occasionally without these days, to render the more frequent use of it attainable; and had the satisfaction to find, that the chief, if not the sole objections to this, turned upon the prejudices of the people in favour of the present custom. I have now, once and again, consulted yourselves, when met in judicature, respecting this important point, unwilling to act without soliciting your concurrence; and was happy to find, that your liberality of sentiment led you to declare, that if our Session and Congregation, or any other under your inspection, thought fit to adopt such a plan, you had no objection, or would not restrict their Christian liberty. In this you have doubtless judged right; for where the word of God is silent, or appears not, by precept or example, to sanction a religious usage, no church authority can bind the observance of it on the conscience, or preclude a right to return to what is almost on all hands owned to be scriptural. Of this mind the Compilers of the Westminster Confession seem to have been, as appears from the following extract: "God alone is the Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship; so that to believe such doctrine, or obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience, and reason also." The laws and institutions of Christ need not the sanction of men to give them validity and currency in his kingdom; and to act upon such a supposition, would be to offer him the grossest insult.

As the prejudices of education, in religious matters, are not soon, or easily got rid of, I could not bring myself to attempt any alteration from the usual mode, till some farther means were used, to satisfy the scrupulous on that head; tho' indeed, a goodly number in the Congregation have been long since quite satisfied, with regard to the propriety of dispensing the ordinance occasionally, without the extra-services prescribed by custom, had they themselves, when publicly convened, not expressed their desire to that purpose. With that view,

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both the Sermon, and the Dialogue subjoined to it, are now published, that every one who chuses may have access to peruse and ponder at leisure, the reasons that occurred in vindication of the proposed plan, and so be able to give the same to those who may call the propriety of it in question.

I embrace this opportunity of congratulating the Synod, and the Christian world at large, on the late rapid decrease of religious prejudices among different denominations; and on that spirit of free inquiry, and rational investigation, which now so generally prevails. 'Tho' this, in certain cases, may unhappily lead to scepticism, or infidelity; yet where truth is the grand object in view, and the dictates of scripture and sound reason are allowed to conduct and determine in the candid inquiry, to true religion, and to human kind, the consequences will be both beneficial and honourable. May not I indulge the pleasing hope, that my worthy Fathers and Brethren, having consented to the mode recommended in general, will endeavour, without delay, to reduce to practice, under their immediate charge, what their own judgment approves as founded upon, and agreeable to the sacred oracles? The prejudices of the people in favour of the present custom, however inveterate, and long entertained, will give way to union and assiduity in their teachers, in recommending a practice sanctioned from above, and wisely adapted to advance growth in grace and holiness; and the period may not be far distant, when they will be as ready to condemn our present supineness or silence on that head, as they are now to justify or applaud them.

In matters of divine institution, a deviation from the simplicity of scripture examples, is far from being, as some suppose, a matter of indifference, or trivial concern: for religion must ever suffer by the change, and it sets a precedent of fatal tendency. If our Forefathers have done and risked so much, in their laudable efforts to reform the gross abuses which prevailed in their day, will we make no attempt to perfect what they have left us to accomplish? Christians of different descriptions are, to their honour be it spoken, opening their eyes on certain truths, and correcting, or giving up some things,
which

which heretofore have been held sacred, or obligatory. Let it not be said, that those who are committed to our charge, are last in coming to the light, and that we set them the example. It is incident to man to err, even with the means of knowledge within his reach; yet is it characteristic of a Christian to correct his mistakes, whether in matters of faith or practice, so soon as seen by the light of truth, and to be open to conviction.

The chief merit of what is here submitted to your consideration, and that of the public, is the desire and aim to direct the minds of men to an important duty, and excite to the due performance of it. The subject may have been discussed to far better purpose, tho' perhaps in a less popular form; yet the tracts purposely written upon it are seldom to be got, and but in few hands. Should God deign to own the present attempt, as the mean of bringing any to view the ordinance in question in the light of divine truth, and of promoting its simple and primitive observance, the great object in view will be so far gained, and let him have the glory. All that I ask of you whom I thus address, and of all the servants of Christ, into whose hands this Publication may come, is, that if you judge it agreeable to the oracles of truth, and calculated to promote the interest of our Redeemer's kingdom, you will be so good as to recommend the attentive perusal of it to your people, and lend your mutual aid in reducing the object in view to practice. Thus will you confer a real obligation on a fellow labourer in the Gospel vineyard, who cordially wishes your happiness, and all success in the work of the ministry, and is happy to subscribe himself,

Dear Fathers and Brethren,

- your and their affectionate brother and servant,
in the cause of our common Lord,

Dundee, July 22, }
1796.

N. D.

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S E R M O N.

I COR. XI. 23.

For I have received of the Lord, that which I also delivered unto you.

IT is required in stewards that they be found faithful, and answer the ends of their appointment. In proportion to the importance of any trust will be the consequences, either of neglecting, or duly observing it. To the concerns of the soul and eternity, what are those of time and the body, which so often, unhappily gain the preference? Inattention to the latter may mark imprudence, and produce temporary inconveniences; but inattention to the former betrays extreme folly, and is fraught with consequences at once serious and everlasting. To a wise man every thing appears valuable only in proportion as it contributes to the great ends of his existence, or to his capacity of doing and receiving good. In this view, that religion which we have the honour to profess, claims our first and chief regard. To understand the doctrines, and observe the duties it inculcates, in a due and proper manner, must appear of vast consequence to every one who is firmly persuaded of its divine original, and indispensable obligation. It comes to us recommended by the suffrage of the wisest and best in all ages, myriads of whom could attest from their own experience, that wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths purity and peace; what cannot be said of the flowery and frequented paths of vice and folly, which lead down to the chambers of death. My yoke, said Jesus, is easy, and my burden is light; and they that follow me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. No wonder then, the good and pious in every age should revere the memory, and applaud the faithfulness of those whom God hath been pleased to employ as his chief instruments, in imparting and securing such a blessing to mankind.

The apostles of our Lord, and their fellow labourers in the sacred vineyard, were active and diligent in the faithful discharge of the duties of their important function; and also kept a watchful eye over the fruits of their public labours. Wherever they came, and were received as the messengers of Heaven, the due administration of the word and ordinances of the gospel engaged their chief attention, and gave life and energy to their pious zeal,
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prayers and exertions. Not only were they diligent and faithful in such labours of love, while personally present with these churches which they had the honour to plant or water; but also took special care when absent, that they might not be unhappily seduced from the purity and simplicity of the New Testament doctrine and worship, and so the labour which they had bestowed upon them prove in vain. They were well apprised, that the devices of Satan, that subtle adversary; the cunning craftiness of false teachers, who lie in wait to deceive, and so serve his cause, while they copy his example; and the corruption and deceitfulness of the human heart, which is still to be suspected and dreaded both in good and bad men, conspire to render such care and fidelity but too necessary. That malicious enemy is ever ready to sow tares while the servants are asleep; and his efforts have, alas! been too successful. This is more or less apparent in every age, and in the present is too conspicuous to escape the notice of the observant Christian.

Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, was remarkable for his pastoral fidelity, and consequent success; whence his example merits and demands the imitation of all entrusted with the sacred office. Having formed at Corinth a Christian church, by the Divine blessing upon his labours, with which he continued to officiate for near the space of two years, he was still mindful of them, and entertained and expressed a warm concern for their prosperity, even when the advancement of his Master's kingdom in the world required his personal presence elsewhere. This pious and benevolent temper appears conspicuous throughout all his epistles. Such laudable concern led him, when absent from Corinth, to make frequent inquiries after their spiritual state; whence he came to learn to his grief, that certain gross disorders and abuses had crept in among them, to the no small hinderance of the gospel, and the great prejudice of Christian edification. Hence he writes them, once and again, at considerable length, not only with the authority of an apostle, but also with the tender concern and affection of a father. In this epistle he endeavours, under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit, to rectify or suppress these encroaching evils, which threatened not only their prosperity, but their very existence as a Christian church; that having espoused them to one husband, he might present them as a chaste virgin to Christ. In the preceding verses, he animadverts on their very culpable conduct, in the participation of the ordinance of the Supper, by which they had, in a great measure, counteracted or frustrated the benign ends of this holy institution. This was an evil of no inconsiderable magnitude, by which both the honour, and the interest of Christianity were not a little affected.

Some have thought that the scandalous abuse here complained of, had particular respect to the feasts of charity, which are said to have prevailed for a time among the early Christians; but the apostle

apostle plainly refers it to the Lord's Supper, which alone is specified in the context. One unhappy effect of this gross and early corruption of a divine ordinance was, that they came together, in this instance, not for the better, but for the worse;—not to eat the Lord's supper, according to its pure and simple institution, but a feast, in respect to the mode of receiving, if not also of administering it, merely of their own devising, which they had presumptuously substituted in its place. Their conduct was not more offensive to God, than contrary to the nature and ends of this divine ordinance, and subversive of all Christian fellowship therein. It implied contempt of the authority of Christ, who appointed this ordinance to be observed in his church to the close of time; the want of a due sense of his own presence and amazing love, of which it affords a striking pledge and proof; and also a gross insult to their poorer brethren, by shewing such partiality at that very table, where all the children of God should appear on a level. To correct these irregularities, the apostle does not adduce the authority, opinion, or decisions of fallible men, whose gifts and piety may have acquired them fame in the church; but directs our attention to the institution of the ordinance itself, as revealed to him by his blessed Lord, and recorded and transmitted by the Spirit of inspiration in the oracles of truth, for the direction of the church in every age. This is indeed the only infallible rule by which such abuses can be reformed, and such errors refuted, as may at any time unhappily prevail among Christians; for whatever is not agreeable to the law and the testimony, howsoever otherwise sanctioned, ought to be rejected, as not only unprofitable, but, in one view or other, pernicious.

Our apostle had not seen Christ in the flesh, nor conversed with him, which seems to have been a requisite to the sacred office which he held; whence, as he expresses it, he was like one born out of due time; and therefore could not be present with the other apostles when this ordinance was instituted by their common Master. From him however, he received, by immediate revelation, that account which he gives of it in the context; whence we can rely upon his testimony respecting it, with equal certainty as if he had been an eye and ear witness of that solemn transaction. What he had so received from the Lord, he, in the course of his ministry, delivered in person to the Corinthian church, without varying, adding or diminishing in any point whatever. The same he faithfully records in this part of his letter to them, in which we are favoured with a more full and particular account of the institution than we have any where else in scripture; for the errors and corruptions which have at different times sprung up in the church, have given occasion to a more full and clear vindication of the truth and ordinances of the gospel; whence the attempts of Satan, the grand enemy of truth and evangelical worship, have recoiled

recoiled upon himself. In the New Testament writings, we have a more sure and clear word of prophecy than even that spoken by angels, tho' stedfast, to which we do well to give heed, as to a light shining in a dark place, till present shadows are fled away: for divine truth is one and uniform in its nature and requisitions, whereas the deviations from it are numerous, and not seldom at variance with each other. He that walks by the unerring rule of Divine truth, and delivers what he hath received there of the Lord, walks surely, and will be justified of the children of wisdom.

In the farther illustration of the subject, it is proposed, thro' Divine aid,

I. To shew that the ministers of Christ are indispensibly bound to teach and inculcate what he hath enjoined them, or what they receive from him in his word, whether respecting matters of faith or practice.

II. Trace the scripture account of the institution and administration of our Lord's supper, which the apostle had more immediately in his eye, in the passage under consideration.

III. Then answer some objections to a strict adherence to the mode of administering it, which is exemplified in scripture; and point out some of the bad effects of neglecting, or deviating from an example so sanctioned and recommended.

I. As I appear here on this occasion, Fathers and Brethren, whom I highly respect in the Lord, in consequence of your own choice and appointment, may not I hope for your attention and candor, while I attempt, with all due deference, to declare in your hearing, as now proposed, what I have received from the Lord in his word, respecting the important subject under consideration? We all profess to receive his word as the unerring rule of our faith and conduct, both in our private capacity as Christians, and in the exercise of our public function as Ministers of the gospel. That word we are sacredly bound to make the subject of our frequent and most serious inquiries, and the basis and standard of our public worship and instructions; and therefore, whatever it speaks we are not left at liberty to hear or forbear at pleasure. His sheep hear his voice, by which they are characterized, and distinguished from the men of the world; and that voice in any instance once heard, it will be morally impossible not to yield to its commanding authority, and admit its heavenly light. In this respect, we are to call no man master, or body of men, however respectable; for one is our master, even Christ; and the voice once announced from the excellent glory commands us to hear him. In composing this discourse, the Speaker can say, if he at all know his own heart, that he felt the force of that injunction, and no wish but to fulfil it; and what he hath to advance, he speaks as to

wise

wise men, who have an undoubted right to judge what he saith; yet only by the unerring word of our common Master, to whom we are all accountable for what we teach and practise in his Church. He is far from supposing that he can advance any thing new on the subject; but the best, while on earth, may be profited by the review of truths already known; for even pure minds, saith an apostle, may be stirred up by way of remembrance.

That the ministers of Christ are solemnly and indispensibly bound to teach and inculcate what he hath enjoined them, whether respecting matters of faith or practice, no Christian will presume to deny. Every one, in the least acquainted with the sacred writings, will easily recollect many solemn injunctions to that purpose. Their fidelity and freedom from the blood of all men, depend on their not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God; but by a faithful manifestation of the truth, approving themselves to every man's conscience as in his sight. They are to speak the word in season and out of season, to speak the truth in love; and to hope for success, while any part of this is designedly concealed or disguised, would be to do evil that good may come. What saith God of these prophets who handled his word deceitfully, or made no conscience of declaring it to the people? "But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings." Are upright pastors the salt of the earth, and the lights of the word? This character belongs to them no less for the purity of their doctrines, than the sanctity of their lives; and should they lose, or not possess and diffuse the savour of the knowledge of Christ, he himself tells us, that they are "thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." When we own him as the author of our faith, and our Lord from heaven, we assent to his unlimited claim to obedience in this respect; and it is only by complying with that claim, without reserve, that his servants can say, with Paul in the text, "For I have received from the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you." It is scarce necessary to observe, that no man can now justly pretend to have received from the Lord, what he delivers to others, in the same manner Paul received it; whence he and his fellow apostles were ambassadors for him, and in his stead, in a sense to which ordinary teachers of Christianity have no claim. These first ministers of his kingdom derived their commission and instructions, in an immediate and extraordinary manner, from himself; and were endued with supernatural gifts for the discharge of their important trust. But tho' such qualifications for the ministry have ceased, yet ordinary ministers of the gospel may be said to receive from the Lord, what they deliver in his name to others, when they look up to him, by faith and prayer, for the teaching and illumination of his Holy Spirit, to lead them

into all truth; and, in humble dependance on his promised aid, study and consult his word as the men of their counsel, making it the standard and ground of their public instructions. Our apostle exhorts Timothy to give himself to study, meditation and prayer, that his profiting might appear to all. Those who follow Christ as their Master and pattern, and look up to him for direction in all their ministrations, and a blessing upon them, are the only persons that have reason to hope he will make them fishers of men. He is that green tree of whom all their fruit and success are found.

The very character of ministers of Christ, and angels or messengers of the churches, imports their strict adherence to his instructions, and their acting from a steady regard to his glory; for must not he forfeit such delegated trust, who shews but a partial respect to the declared will of his master, or presumes to substitute, in whole, or in part, the dictates of his own will in its place? His express orders to his apostles, just before his ascension to glory, were, "Go ye and teach all nations—teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." What he said then, he still saith to all put in trust with the ministry; and it is only by observing it that they can expect an interest in the annexed promise; "lo I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." No danger or difficulty can excuse their non-compliance with this charge, else Moses would be justified in his reluctance to undertake an embassy to Pharaoh, and Jonah in attempting to evade the execution of his commission to Nineveh. Nathan too might be justly blamed for his direct charge to David, Jeremiah for his plain dealing with the king and princes of Israel, and John the Baptist for declaring Herod's conduct unlawful, in cohabiting with his brother's wife. What a solemn charge did God give to the prophet Jeremiah when about to commence his public labours? "Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For behold, I have made thee this day a fenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land. And they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." The dignity of kings and princes, or the sacredness of the priestly character, were to be no shelter against the freedom of admonition, instruction, and reproof, when necessary; for, in this respect, there was no exception, no privileged order. Neglect of duty here would have entailed guilt and disgrace; for the prophet that teacheth lies, or concealeth the truth, in order to conciliate the favour of men, or avoid the effects of their displeasure, is, in Messiah's kingdom, the tail. To palliate the vices of men, spare their prejudices, or shun to declare the wrath of God against their unrighteous deeds, would be the direct way to bring the

the blood of those who perish, thro' such criminal neglect, upon our own head; for God would require it at our hand. So thought the apostle when he said "Wo is unto me if I preach not the gospel." He told the elders at Ephesus, that it was by not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God, that he was free from the blood of all men. The faith once delivered to the saints, and that course of holy obedience which is founded thereon, and promoted by it, are well worth earnestly contending for; and demand our vigilant attention, and faithful, active endeavours, as a valuable depositum committed to our trust—a precious talent given us to occupy, till our Lord come to require an account, and reward the labours of his faithful servants. All this must we do, would we give in our account at length with joy and not with grief.

How strict and weighty the apostle's charge to Timothy, respecting his duty as a minister in the church of God? "Take heed unto thyself, and unto thy doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. Hold fast the form of sound words in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus, and study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearance and his kingdom: preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." To us as well as Timothy is this solemn charge given, that each may be able to say with the apostle; "For I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you." "Go, and speak to the people all the words of this life."

There is nothing more unpleasant in itself, or less welcome to the sons of men, than denouncing the judgments of God against their unbelief in rejecting the gospel, and their other sins committed in defiance of its sacred light. Painful as this duty is, the Lord gave it once and again in charge to his prophet Jonah—"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me;—arise, go into Nineveh, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." However reluctant, he is left no choice but implicit obedience to the heavenly mandate. Agreeably to this, Isaiah receives the following injunction; "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Israel their sins." The punctual observance of divine orders, we have exemplified in the conduct of the servant in the parable of the marriage supper; "Go out quickly (saith his Lord) into the streets, and lanes of the city, and bring in hither, the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded." Both the prophets and apostles discharged their duty, in this respect, with a fidelity peculiar

peculiar to themselves; yet should the lips of all now invested with the sacred character, as much as the priest's lips of old, keep knowledge, and the people learn the law at their mouth, even all that we are required to believe and practise in order to salvation. Our blessed Lord perfectly fulfilled, in his personal ministry, what he had long before said by the Spirit of prophecy: "I delight to do thy will, O my God. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart, I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving kindness, and thy truth from the great congregation." After such a solemn declaration, verified to the full in the history of his life, will any presume to say, that he, or his apostles kept back any thing calculated to promote the glory of God, or Christian improvement, in the observance of any of his ordinances; which must have been the case, if any services are proper or necessary to the due administration of these, which neither he himself, nor any of these inspired servants ever once recommend or exemplify? Be such a conduct far from both, and may we be kept or reclaimed from acting a part, that plainly implies an imputation so injurious and unmerited! The Lord is just and consistent in all his ways. The noble and emphatic declaration of Cornelius, in his own, and in the name of his assembled friends, comprehends the duty, and includes the reciprocal obligation both of Christian teachers and people; "We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." That venerable Roman officer took it for granted, that an apostle, to whom he was directed in so extraordinary a manner, would bring nothing to their ears but what he had received in charge from the Lord; and to all this, without exception, he bows unfeigned and ready submission. The obligation to this is unchangeable as the nature and will of that Being, who hath an indisputable right to demand our faith and obedience, to whatever he is pleased to reveal and enjoin. The ministers of truth being sacredly bound to declare all this, as occasions may require, Christians are also bound to receive it in the spirit of love and meekness, and to act accordingly. He alone hath a right to determine the articles of our faith, bind conscience his deputy in the human breast, and prescribe laws to the external conduct. All this he hath sufficiently done in his holy word, else it would not be a perfect rule of faith and righteousness, to which nothing can be added, and from which nothing can be taken, but upon pain of incurring his displeasure. Due attention to the word of truth, in matters of duty or religious observances, is the more necessary, or rather indispensable; because, whenever a duty varies from the rules given in scripture respecting it, whether in its substance, in its principle, or even in its circumstances, it becomes essentially defective.

defective, and, in some cases, sinful; whence that confounding question will apply, "Who hath required this at your hand?" It is generally allowed, that inferences, fairly drawn from scripture premisses, are just and conclusive; and that apostolic example, in matters of religious worship, hath the force of precept. Upon this ground rests our obligation to observe the first day of the week, as a day of sacred rest to the Lord; for we have no positive injunction, requiring the observance of that particular portion of our time. But should any, on this account, propose to lay aside the observance of the Lord's day, in commemoration of his resurrection, as the Supper is of his sufferings and death, would he not be thought unworthy of the character or privileges of a Christian? As God alone hath a right to prescribe what constitutes the essential parts of any duty or religious service; so it belongs to him also to determine the mode or circumstances of observing it, so far as binding on the conscience; and both are to be learned from the directions, or approved examples contained in his word. All this is no more than every master requires and expects from his servant, who would plead in vain, that he thought such and such things very decent and necessary additions to the instructions which he had received, in order to render his service more perfect and acceptable. Might not the master justly reply, Of that I must be allowed to be the best judge; I have told you what to do, and set you the example; and therefore, it was not your business to exceed or deviate from my instructions, upon any pretence whatever, as if I had omitted something necessary, and you knew what was proper better than myself. In the institution and observance of the passover, in which Moses was faithful as a servant, the things adverted to above were provided for, and exemplified; and there can be no doubt but the same was done in the institution and observance of the holy ordinance of our Lord's Supper, of which, or of him as exhibited therein, the former was a remarkable type: for in that solemn transaction he was no less faithful and attentive to the will of his Father, and the edification of his people, as a Son, acting in, and presiding over his own house. Let us go and do likewise. I have dwelt too long on this part of the subject, considering before whom I speak; but there is a material difference betwixt knowing a thing in theory, and the proper application of that knowledge to practice; to which the very best of men need to be often excited. Proceed we now, as proposed.

II. To trace the Scripture account of the sacred institution, which Paul had more immediately in his view in the text, and the mode of its administration under the eye of his apostles. The inspired writings are profitable for instruction in righteousness, that Christians may be perfected, in whatever respects faith or practice,

practice, and throughly furnished to all good works. They fully and clearly teach whatever we are to believe respecting God, and also what duties he requires of us, as his professed servants and people. To these writings therefore, we with propriety refer as an all-sufficient and unerring rule of faith and conduct; the authorative and ultimate judge in every religious controversy. Their binding obligation in all cases is antecedent to, and independent of human authority, which can neither alter, impair, nor strengthen that obligation. In theory, Christians in general agree, that what the scriptures do not require by plain precept, just inference, or approved example, which is generally allowed to have the force of a command, can have no binding authority on the conscience; and indeed, where Christ leaves his people free, why should they be entangled, or entangle themselves with any yoke of bondage, which, in one form or other, must prove a snare, or an incumbrance, however plausible the reasons by which it may be enforced? And, in like manner, whenever they speak as above, we are bound to hear, and lest no power to add, modify, or explain away at pleasure. The truth of these remarks granted and kept in view, which, it is presumed, cannot be controverted, let us proceed to examine, with candor and reverence, what the divine oracles say concerning the institution and administration of the holy ordinance of the supper; that we may ascertain our own duty as Christians, and ministers of the gospel, so far as the administration of it among us is concerned. To the law and testimony of Heaven, in inquiries of this nature, should our appeal be made; and let these determine with the authority of a final and decisive judge, from whose infallible verdict there lies no appeal.

The evangelist Matthew informs us, that Jesus, at the close of the paschal feast or supper, which was a noted figure of his own atoning sacrifice, instituted the ordinance, which, from its relation to him, is termed the Lord's supper. This was intended to commemorate a deliverance far greater and more interesting than that of Israel from Egyptian thralldom and misery; and an event, which at once summed up, and abolished all the propitiatory sacrifices under the law; which were only the shadows of good things to come, but of him was the substance. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body." By terming the consecrated bread his body, he could mean no more, than that it was a figure, representation, and memorial thereof, as bruised and broken, by his sufferings and death, for the redemption of his church and people. "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The express injunction, Drink ye all of it, while it intimates our Lord's foreknowledge of what superstition would

do,

do, in process of time, to the maiming of this ordinance, by denying the cup to the people, also provides against this gross invasion of one of their sacred rights. The cup, which he figuratively calls his blood of the new testament, serves to seal, ratify and confirm, to the real communicant, the new and better covenant, with all its precious blessings. Agreeably to the nature and design of the holy institution, as here recorded, the apostle, in the chapter preceding that where our text lies, says, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" Having thus instituted and appointed the ordinance of the supper, for the reception and benefit of genuine disciples in every age, by setting apart, by prayer and thanksgiving, to a sacred use, these sensible signs of bread and wine, our Lord concludes the solemn transaction, like the jews at the close of the passover feast, with an hymn of grateful praise, and then goes forth to the mount of Olives, to meet his combined foes, and impending sufferings.

Mark gives the same account, and adds, that all the disciples drank, as enjoined, of the cup, perhaps for the reason already assigned. The Evangelist Luke narrates the same solemn action, in almost the same words; withal pointing out the great object of the institution, in respect both of its author and partakers, the remembrance of himself, or, as Paul expresses it, the shewing forth of his death. The pious and grateful review and commemoration of the Saviour's amazing love, sufferings and death, should constitute the Christian's devout exercise at his holy table. Each of these sacred historians records an affectionate discourse, delivered by our Lord to his disciples, after they partook of his supper, probably before they left the guest chamber; the one giving place to some things omitted by the other. John gives no account of the institution itself, this having been already fully done by three competent witnesses, who had perfect access to know the truth of what they relate; yet he records, at considerable length, what may be justly termed our Lord's fare-well sermon. That discourse is admirably adapted to the present disconsolate circumstances of his disciples, and appears to have been delivered immediately after the celebration of the supper, and before they removed from the upper chamber where it was instituted. To this discourse he subjoins that remarkable prayer, which is recorded in the 17th chapter of his gospel, and usually styled his intercessory prayer.

In all these passages, not the least notice is given of appropriating certain days to fasting and preparation, previous to dispensing and receiving this holy ordinance, nor of a day of thanksgiving to follow; for our Lord, and his apostles after him, meant

that his people should live in a state of habitual preparation for such approaches to him, and his coming, having their loins girded about, and their lamps burning; and constantly cherish sentiments of gratitude for this and all his benefits. A duty so offensive to the world, and so reluctantly and poorly attended to even by the bulk of the professed disciples of Jesus, is inculcated both in his word, and by the nature and design of this institution. But what are we to infer from such silence? Was it casual, or actually designed? Doubtless our Lord had good reason for such silence, and from it, it is both just and natural to infer, that such services, so far from being essential to the due administration and reception of this ordinance; make not even a necessary appendage. They must be then a matter of mere human tradition or invention, considered as attached to the supper, and to inculcate the observance of them in that connection, or act as if they were in the least necessary, or conducive of themselves, to render our observance of that ordinance more acceptable to God, would be to teach for doctrines, and inculcate for duties the precepts and customs of men, which is the direct way to lose our time and labour. "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men." The fast which God hath chosen and will accept, is not to be confined to a day, and may be observed without encroaching on the necessary calls of business, or the ordinary functions of life, if we may credit the account which he himself hath given of it in his word Isa. 58. ch. Let those then who plead for the obligation, or propriety of such observances, in order to a due reception of our Lord's supper, blame those who would direct the attention of Christians to the subject, account for his own silence on the head, and reconcile it to his wisdom and fidelity in ordering all the concerns of his worship. The written word is our instruction and rule, beyond or above which we must not pretend to be wise. Did not our Lord foresee whatever is necessary to a due approach to him in this ordinance, and, foreseeing it, make every proper and necessary provision for it? To deny the first, would be to divest him of his wisdom and omniscience: and to call the last in question would be to tax him in effect with culpable neglect, and represent the advocates of the modern practice as wiser and more provident than he. Yea, it would make him less faithful in God's house as a Son, than Moses was as a servant, in disparagement of his superior dignity, and contradiction to express scripture testimony. To expose such inconsistencies needs little more than to mention them; yet are they implied in the present practice, and in the arguments so often urged in its support and defence.

the wisdom from above, and a practice conformable to it, shall be justified of her children, so soon as seen in her light, and will justify them in return.

Some may however suppose, that tho' the Evangelists be silent, in their account of the institution, respecting certain things which are now thought decent and proper, if not necessary to accompany every celebration of it, that yet our Lord might give them farther instructions on this subject, tho' not mentioned in scripture, during the forty days after his resurrection, in which, we are told, he was seen of them, and spake of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. But tho' they might need, and also receive farther instruction on many points, such, for instance, as the change of the sabbath to the first day of the week, in memory of his own resurrection; yet what respect a divine institution, as a matter of fact, already ascertained and established, seems entirely to supercede any such farther direction; and hence, when Paul, at an after period, sets himself to correct the very culpable abuses of this sacred ordinance, which obtained at Corinth, he refers solely to the original institution, as he received it from Christ himself. This is the only way sanctioned of Heaven for separating the chaff of human customs and traditions from the pure and nourishing wheat of divine truth, and of the services which it enjoins, and the way which is attempted in this discourse. But if such farther instructions, upon a point of such moment to the church of God, had been really given, can we suppose the apostle would have passed them over in silence on such an occasion? His account of the institution in its nature and design, of which he reminds the church at Corinth, is the very same with that given in the gospels. All that he adds is with a view to direct them how to observe it in a due manner, and to avoid the guilt and danger of receiving it unworthily†. The very language of the apostle seems to imply, if not to enjoin frequency: "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me—for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup," &c. It certainly justifies Christians in communicating often, provided it be done in remembrance of him; and where there is no law against this, there can be no transgression. As we may rest assured, that he hath omitted no circumstance material to the due observance of it, and yet says nothing of these days and services which custom, or the u-

† *Eating and drinking unworthily*, says Dr Guyse, in his note on the passage, refers not to the unworthiness of persons that come to the Lord's supper, but to their unworthy manner of receiving it; and has a plain reference to the uncharitable and scandalous mismanagement of the Corinthians at that ordinance, which the apostle had been censuring. This therefore ought to be no discouragement to humble souls, as it too often is, that sincerely desire to partake of it in a holy manner, and to right ends, according to the institution of Christ; but should excite their serious concern to celebrate this, as they also ought, every other ordinance, with a religious regard to its spiritual design.

usage of some churches hath for some time, attached to it, whence the frequent enjoyment of it by any one congregation, is morally impossible; may it not be inferred that these ought to be laid aside as an incumbrance, and a bar to our compliance with the intention of its Divine author? The causes that led to adopt these, and for a time justified perhaps the use of them, have long since, thro' the kindness of Providence, ceased to exist in these lands. The scriptures doubtless furnish the best examples, and to them we should appeal.

Of the three thousand that were converted on the day of Pentecost, and formed the church at Jerusalem, it is said, That "they continued *steadfastly* in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in *breaking of bread*, and in prayers." However different, or opposite their former sentiments and manners might have been, yet thro' the knowledge and love of the truth, and the concurring agency of divine grace on their hearts, they are brought to act in the noble manner here described; and similar causes will always produce similar effects. It is scarce necessary to remark, that the phrase "breaking of bread," is allowed to denote, in the connection in which it occurs here, and also elsewhere in this book of the Acts, the participation of the Lord's supper, by an usual figure which puts a part for the whole; and indeed, it admits of no other consistent sense*. It may allude to his significant action

* If this is not granted, then we have no mention of receiving the Supper in the account here given of their public worship; for tho' the phrase *breaking of bread* be used to signify a common, or a miraculous meal, as well as that ordinance; yet being here inserted between other exercises of devotion, it seems most natural to understand it of the Lord's supper. It imports, it would appear, a very different thing from their "breaking bread from house to house," mentioned at the 46 verse. This last very probably intends their friendly intercourse, or brotherly familiarity at their common meals, else it would look too like a needless tautology in such a short and general account of their Christian temper and behaviour; which is the more probable, because it is introduced after the sacred historian had spoken of their having all things common among them.

The sentiment expressed above is borrowed from the judicious Dr Guise, in his note subjoined to his paraphrase on the passage. He paraphrases the clause, *they continued steadfastly in breaking of bread*, "They often joined together in celebrating the Lord's supper, as the memorial of his death." The like phrase, in the 20th chap. and 7th ver. "when the disciples came together to *break bread*," he thus expounds, "When upon the first day of the week, they assembled together in course, for all acts of public worship, and particularly for celebrating the Lord's supper, the whole of which ordinance is usually expressed by breaking of bread, in remembrance of his death, in which his body was broken as a sacrifice for sin, and spiritual food was prepared for believing souls." And on the 11th ver. where the same phrase occurs, he adds, "Then the apostle, returning to the upper room, administered the Lord's supper to the church, himself partaking of the elements with them, which by a figure, that puts a part for the whole, may be expressed by his taking and eating bread." He subjoins in a note, "Some think that the apostle's *breaking bread and eating*, was merely a common meal for refreshment: But I take it to relate to his administering the Lord's supper, for the celebration of which the disciples came together, as we are told in these very terms of *breaking bread*," ver. 7.

of breaking bread, when instituting it, as symbolically expressive of his approaching sufferings. These early Christians, as the above account of their conduct imports, gave diligent and constant attendance

Dr Hammond paraphrases the clauses in 2 chap. 42 ver. and in the 7th and 11th verses of 20th chap. of Acts: "And all that were so, continued assiduous in eating the Lord's supper;—And on the Lord's day, the Christians being met together to receive the sacrament;—And they spent the time together in receiving the sacrament of the body of Christ."

Mr Henry explains, "They continued stedfastly in *breaking of bread*," "They frequently joined in the ordinance of the Lord's supper; they continued in breaking of bread, in celebrating that memorial of their Master's death, as those that were not ashamed to own their relation to, and their dependance upon Christ, and him crucified." Upon the 20th chap. and 7th ver. he adds, "They came together to break bread, i. e. to celebrate the ordinance of the Lord's supper, that one instituted sign of breaking the bread being put for all the rest;" *the bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ*. "In the breaking of the bread, not only the breaking of Christ's body for us to be a sacrifice for our sins is commemorated, but the breaking of Christ's body to us to be food and a feast for our souls is signified. In the primitive times, it was the custom of many churches to receive the Lord's supper every Lord's day, celebrating the memorial of Christ's death in the former, with that of his resurrection in the latter; and both in comfort, in a solemn assembly, to testify their joint occurrence in the same faith and worship." These are the words of that noted Commentator, and eminently good and pious man.

The Reader would not be troubled with these extracts on so plain a point, were it not that the Author having had occasion to preach lately from the noted passage (Acts 2. 42.) descanted on above, and to explain the phrase *breaking of bread*, as denoting the celebration of the Lord's supper, some present, who would be thought wiser, and more knowing than others, called that sense in question, and seemed to think it no better than wrestling scripture, chiefly because no mention is made of the cup; and would understand it either as expressive of a common meal, or the feasts of charity. It must appear plain to the candid and attentive Christian, that in the two passages referred to in the Acts, it cannot consistently mean either; but there is nothing so plain that some will not cavil at, when they have a purpose to serve. Suppose the sacred historian meant to say the first, that the three thousand pious converts continued stedfastly in eating their daily bread, or breaking bread at common meals, this would be paying a poor compliment to their zeal and piety; for the worst of men do the same; and to give such a circumstance place in his short detail of their religious temper and services, would be quite ridiculous. With regard to the last, none will pretend to say, that the great and leading object of their religious assemblies on the first day of the week, was to keep their feasts of charity. That the apostles, and primitive Christians frequently partook of the supper, is evident; but that this should be no where taken notice of in their writings cannot be supposed.

All the Expositors of scripture, whom the Author had access to consult, explain the phrase *breaking of bread* as above; and indeed, could consistently explain it in no other sense. The Reader's indulgence is begged, while two extracts more are given, the first from the famous Dr Whitby. This author is not so clear that the Lord's supper is intended in Acts 2. 42. tho' he gives no just reason for so thinking. But where the same phrase occurs in the 20th chap. 7 and 11 verses, he understands it of that ordinance. In the text he hath it thus, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread (i. e. to celebrate the *eucharist*;) "when he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, (i. e. had celebrated the sacrament of the Lord's body and blood.)"

In his Annotations, after shewing that the apostles and first Christians observed the

attendance on the ministry of the apostles, and stedfastly persevered in the faith and profession of the doctrines which they taught; while their conversation was such as became these doctrines. They were also stedfast and uniform in Christian communion with

the first day of the week, or the Lord's day, as a day appointed for religious worship, he proceeds to observe, "That they then met together to break bread; which phrase doth signify the sacred action performed in celebration of the holy sacrament, which it was the custom of the primitive Christians to receive in all their Church assemblies on the Lord's day: This the apostle intimates, when he complains of his *Corinthians*. 1 Cor. 11. *that they came together for the worse, because, when they came together in the Church, there were divisions among them,*" so that they did not eat together of the table of the Lord. Now thus to come together in one place, saith he, is not to eat the Lord's supper; i. e. it is not so to do it as that sacred action ought to be performed: This therefore when they came together in the Church they did, and therefore, what is coming together, ver. 17. coming to the Church, ver. 18. coming to one place, ver. 19 is coming together to eat, ver. 33. Accordingly, it was the custom of the Church, from the Apostle's times, thus to communicate upon the Lord's day; for *Pliny*, in his *Epistle* to the Emperor *Trajan*, tells him that he found nothing to alledge against the Christians, but their obstinacy in their superstition; and that it was their custom to meet together on a set day, before it was light, and to bind themselves by the sacrament to do no evil. Now this *Epistle* was writ only six years after the death of the Evangelist *John*. And *Justin M.* who wrote but forty years after his death, thus speaks, *On Sunday all the Christians in the city or country meet together, because that is the day of our Lord's resurrection, and then we have read unto us the writings of the Prophets and Apostles, this done, the president makes an oration to the assembly; to exhort them to imitate and do the things they heard; then we all join in prayer, and after that we celebrate the sacrament, and they that are willing and able, give alms,*" &c. On ver. 11. he adds, "Tho' here be mention only of breaking bread, yet that the cup was also consecrated and distributed is evident," &c.

The other passage which I have in view, is from the pious and practical Mr *Burkitt*, and deserves the particular attention of those who oppose the frequent administration of the Supper. In his exposition of *Acts* 2. 42. on the clause, *They continued stedfastly in breaking of bread,* he has the following striking remarks. "Another religious office in which they continued constant, was in breaking of bread; That is, receiving the Sacrament; so great and fervent was the devotion of these first Christians, that none of their religious assemblies past, in which they did not make this solemn Commemoration of our Saviour, and shew forth his death; looking upon their other religious services as lame and defective without this. Our Saviour's blood was still warm, and those first Christians kept it so, by their devout and frequent remembrances of it. And it was their constancy in breaking of Bread, which quickened and put life into all their religious actions. This fitted them both for doing and dying; their frequent drinking of the blood of Christ fired them with zeal for shedding their blood for Christ. Lord! What reason can men now give for neglecting so holy and useful an institution? Are we above these helps to a good life which they used? Have we not as much need to arm ourselves against sin and temptation as they had? But the plain truth is, men are not willing to be so holy now as they were then. This Ordinance, their consciences tell them, would engage them to greater strictness of life than they are willing to undergo. They must leave their sins which they are loth to part with; they must forgive their enemies, whom they had rather be revenged of; they must enter into new engagements, whereas they had rather be at liberty. So that those things which make men loth to come to the sacrament, are indeed, if duly considered, the greatest arguments to draw them thither; and according to the example of these primitive Christians, to be constant in breaking of Bread."

with the Church, in all the offices and expressions of brotherly love; and very frequently joined together in commemorating their Lord's sufferings and death at his holy table; and in offering solemn prayer and supplications for all saints; and for the furtherance of the gospel in the world. Such is the description given of their religious worship and conduct, in which we are called, and bound to copy their example; and the qualifying term *frequently* applies equally to every clause in the description. But we practically interpret that term, in reference to the breaking of bread, as if it meant occasionally, or only once or twice a year, when it cannot be so understood as applied to any of the other clauses; which is taking a liberty with scripture inconsistent with all the rules of just criticism, when there is nothing in the nature of the duty in question that forces it upon us. Will any one presume to say, that meeting once in the half year for the purposes of public worship, comes up to the idea expressed in the text? and if not in the one case, why understand it, or act upon it, as if it did in the other? By such liberty of interpreting scripture, if admitted, our obligation to give diligent and constant attendance on the public administration of the word, as deduced from the example of the primitive church here recorded, would be quite done away. The New Testament writings, and those of the first ages of the church sufficiently ascertain the frequency implied in *continuing frequently in breaking of bread*, with which every one must be acquainted who derives his information from these sources.

The very language of scripture would lead us to believe, that the great object the Apostolic church had in view in assembling on the Lord's day, was to celebrate the ordinance of the supper: "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples *came together to break bread*, Paul preached unto them," Acts xx. 7. It is not said, upon that first day of the week, as if this was an extraordinary occasion, or a day fixed on for dispensing this ordinance, because Paul was there, and about to depart; but the great and leading design of their meeting statedly on that day appears from this passage to have been, the commemoration of Christ's sufferings and death, intended by the expression to *break bread*, when connected, as here, with other religious services. Nor is it said, When the disciples came together to worship God, and hear his word, Paul dispensed the supper to them. Every candid person will allow that the Lord's supper is here intended, tho' some are weak, or perverse enough to deny that any such thing is meant in this passage, or in the one adverted to above, for no other reason but because the cup is not mentioned; thus making the church to assemble on the first day of the week, merely or chiefly for the purpose of a public entertainment, while they had private houses to eat in, and the apostle to countenance such attention to an ob-
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ject comparatively of small concern, or low gratification. Here is no mean proof of the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week, else why might not Paul dispense the ordinance on the preceding day, the Jewish sabbath, when he was in such haste to depart? And how came the disciples to meet on the first as a matter of course, or consonant to their usual practice, for the purpose of religious worship, if that day was not held sacred among them? From this passage we may also take occasion to remark, that the church at this early period does not seem to have gone into the practice, which afterwards prevailed, of partaking of the ordinance on other days, besides the first of the week, when publicly met for prayer, and hearing the doctrine of the apostles; for if this had been then customary, he needed not have tarried whole seven days at Troas, (Acts xx. 6.) as he did, in order to enjoy an opportunity of partaking of the supper with the Christians there; when the emergency of the case required his departing at the break of day, after an active and sleepless night. The commemoration of the resurrection of Christ, and of the extraordinary effusion of his Spirit at Pentecost, which fell that year on the first day of the week; and particularly the celebration of the Lord's supper, on that day upon which he rose from the dead, and entered on his heavenly sabbath or rest, furnish very weighty reasons for that change; and we may rest assured, that the disciples did not go into the practice of observing the first day of the week as holy to the Lord, without special instruction to that purpose. The death and resurrection of Jesus being connected as events in order of time, the Church appears to have connected her remembrance of both, by keeping the first day of the week as a sacred rest, and commemorating his death thereon; and can any have a right to separate as duties, what seems to have been thus so early joined together? The pious recollection of the one naturally leads to the other, and in both we view him as our substitute, our head and representative. If we admit that the example of the Apostles and primitive church is any rule to us, and that they were infallibly directed in such matters, we must at the same time acknowledge, that their example hath a commanding authority upon ourselves.

In tracing their practice in regard to the ordinance in question, I shall refer only to one passage more, which appears to me farther to corroborate what hath been said above respecting its frequent celebration. That passage we have in the 20th verse of the preceding context: "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper." Does not this appear to say, like the texts referred to above, that the great end of their religious assemblies was, or should be, to eat his supper; which their divisions, and want of unity and brotherly love, unhappily

happily prevented, by charging to them the very nature of the ordinance. There are diverse things which produce the same fatal effect†; and indeed, a willful deviation from the scriptural simplicity, and frequent observance of the institution, or an obstinate refusal to return to it, would be, when come together occasionally into one place, professedly for such a purpose, not to eat the Lord's supper, according to his intention, manifested in the institution, and celebration of it as recorded in his word.

Since it must be admitted, from the plain testimony of scripture, that the first Christians partook of this ordinance very frequently, if not every Lord's day, is it not obvious to every one, that it could not be attended with the days and services now attached to it, and so much insisted on as a necessary part, or concomitant circumstance? "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy works," is the express precept of the moral law, that unalterable rule of righteousness; but can we suppose, that an all-wise and perfect Being would be so inconsistent with himself, as to invade the wise and benign provision of that law, in this article, by requiring a day to be spent in public fasting so often as this ordinance is, or ought to be dispensed? His mercy precludes every such sacrifice; and indeed, all the services connected therewith in his word, may be overtaken on his own day. May he not then reply to those who make additional days and services necessary to its due administration, and reception? "Who hath required this at your hand? In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments and customs of men?" The passover was but a temporary institution, and only the shadow of good things to come; yet the children of Israel received very minute, and particular directions respecting it, to which they were bound strictly to adhere. But the Lord's supper celebrates an event of the highest moment to Christians, of which the former was only a figure, and will continue in force to the end of time; whence we must infer, that every thing necessary to its due and proper

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† Will any venture to say, that the legal prostitution of this holy ordinance, enjoined in the Test Act, as a necessary qualification for filling offices in the State, is to eat the Lord's supper? Does not this Heaven-daring prostitution of a divine ordinance convert, to use a scripture expression, the table of the Lord into a table of devils, or of Mammon, offer the grossest insult to the Author of that ordinance, and bring the atrocious guilt of treading him under foot, and counting the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, upon these otherwise too guilty lands? "His blood be upon us, and upon our children," said the infatuated Jews of old; and to this day they lie under the sad effects of this dreadful imprecation. By such profanation and impiety, his blood is brought on this guilty nation, which helps to fill up the measure of our iniquity, and will not be forgotten in the day of our impending visitation. O may Gracious Heaven prevent the awful, but deserved punishment, by imparting to all ranks the grace of timely repentance, for this and all our other abominations, that these prove not our aggravated ruin! "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity!"

observance is recorded in scripture, to which no addition ought, on whatever pretence, to be made as an indispensable prerequisite, or necessary supplement. After referring to such authorities, in the illustration of the point under review, need I add, that the Compilers of the Westminster Confession, and Directory for public worship, as also of the books of Discipline, appear to have viewed the matter in the same light, by not once recommending, or even hinting the propriety of any such superadded days, and services? and yet they are allowed to have been men of eminent learning, worth and piety in their day, whose memory is still revered among us.

In fine, if our divine Lord, in instituting the ordinance of the supper, made no mention of the services in question, as pertaining to it; if the apostle, who obtained mercy to be faithful, is quite silent on the head, in the very account of the institution which was intended to correct the early abuses of it, of which the church at Corinth was guilty; and if no such services were known, or observed in the Church of Christ from the beginning, till a late period, as annexed to it, or in the least necessary to its due observation, do they not act in character, as servants of our common Lord, who would explode the obligation, and even the propriety of any such supplemental services, when attention to these must preclude the frequent enjoyment of this refreshing ordinance of love? Having seen what the Scriptures inculcate with regard to the institution of the supper, and the administration of it under the immediate inspection of the apostles, on which I have dwelt but too long, I now go on

III. To answer some Objections to a strict adherence to an example so sanctioned and recommended; and to point out some of the bad Consequences of neglecting this, or deviating therefrom. Various are the objections which have been urged against the plain, scriptural mode of administering our Lord's supper; but here I shall confine myself to some of those, which are more likely to weigh with the stated teachers of religion, as an obstacle to the more frequent enjoyment of such a blessing, or the mean of deterring from making the attempt.

The prejudices of the people in favour of what custom sanctions in religion, without due inquiry respecting it, and against any deviation from it, as a dangerous innovation; and the great difficulty of overcoming these prejudices, have, I am afraid, their weight with many, and prevent their acting up to their light, conviction, and wishes in this particular. That such prejudices exist among professing Christians, of different denominations, cannot be denied; and that these are not easily overcome, every one will experience who makes the attempt. That there are to be

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encountered with meekness and prudence, and that we have no lordship over our people's faith, or religious conduct, authorising us to compel them into any measure, however just and scriptural, without previous conviction of its propriety and divine obligation, and the use of proper means to reach such conviction, is readily granted. Yet is it characteristic of Christ's sheep to hear his voice, and follow him wherever he leads them. Acting in character, they will be ready to say, when assembled in his sanctuary, "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded of God." Be it our care and study, as in duty bound, to declare, without reserve, whatever God commands us, or we have access to learn from his word; leaving the success of it to himself, and the native operation of truth on the minds of his people: for truth is powerful, and will prevail. Tho' prejudices against it, and that uniform course of holy obedience which it requires, be like towering and impassable mountains; yet the church of God, which is the pillar and ground of truth, hath and shall be established on the top and ruins of many such mountains. What are these, be they ever so inveterate, and of ever so long standing? before our Zerubbabel they shall become a plain. This is the doing of the Lord, whose word is as a hammer to break the rock in pieces, and as a fire to melt; whence mountains are levelled, as well as vallies filled up, wherever that word comes in demonstration of the Spirit, and with power. "Not by might nor by power," namely that which is human, or dependent on the creature, "but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Before the beams of divine truth, the shades of night, which usurp its place, must yield and disappear. Few and feeble are the obstacles which we are called to encounter, in the line of duty, compared to those which stood in the way of the early labourers in the vineyard; or of even the reformers from antichristian errors and corruptions in more modern times. Acting with firmness and integrity in his service, and relying on himself for the success of our endeavours, we have ground to pray and hope, that he will make his word mighty, to the pulling down of strong holds, and every vain imagination that exalteth itself against him. Let us only make the trial, in relation to the grand object in question, and our success may far exceed our most sanguine hopes†. This objection is far from being respect-

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† The Author has made the experiment, and found his people far from indocile. Having repeatedly adverted to the subject from the pulpit, which led them to reflect upon it, for little more is necessary to satisfy the candid and judicious, he embraced an opportunity of discoursing purposely upon it, and answering the objections usually urged against the mode proposed, when the Congregation, of their own accord, determined the matter, by dividing upon the question, and only about eight or nine individuals appeared to take the other side. These did not plead any scruples

ful to the understanding, the candour, and teachable disposition of our people.

What interest can they have in shutting their eyes against the light, and opposing the frequent enjoyment of a privilege so much calculated to promote their own edification? The Redeemer's yoke is easy and beneficial; and none but his enemies will say, "We will not have him to reign over us." Were the teachers of Christianity more cordial and united among themselves, in promoting what few, if any among them, will venture to call unscriptural, the real friends of Jesus would not long oppose what comes recommended by the sanction of his authority and love, besides the benefit resulting from it to themselves; and as for others, they make no part of his Church, have no right to his ordinances, and are under the dominion of quite different lords. The want of this cordial union and firmness, in holding forth the pattern shewed us in the mount, and exposing every deviation from it, whether to the right hand, or the left, tends to make reformation in any instance less attainable, and to expose those who attempt it, to obloquy and reproach, as disturbers of the union, uniformity and peace of Christians, while this may be farthest from their thoughts. To the desire of retaining peace, union and uniformity in the church, however important and desirable these things are in themselves, we must not sacrifice truth, edification, and Christian liberty. Such a conduct tends also to keep the prejudices of custom and education in countenance, and to rivet them deeper on the minds of those who are seldom at pains to examine and judge impartially for themselves. Let it not be said, that the Clergy as a body are among the last to reform abuses in religion, where this does not tend to promote their own fame, ease or interest. Of those whom I have the honour now to address, and many others of various denominations, I entertain a very different opinion; and but do them justice to own, that they are too enlightened themselves, to countenance the false prejudices of education in others.

Farther,

scruples respecting the scripture authority of the measure, nor attend to hear the usual objections to it answered, their opposition proceeding from some other cause.

By the joint desire of Session and Congregation, the ordinance was accordingly administered last Lord's day, (Aug. 14) with only a sermon on the Saturday evening, and the usual services on the Lord's day, to the apparent satisfaction of many, both members and spectators, and, it is hoped, to the real benefit of not a few. Tho' some of the usual communicants did not join, yet, thro' the accession of new members, the number who did was scarce fewer than formerly. So far as the author can learn, the general wish in the Congregation is, that it may be thus dispensed once a month, no small attainment, considering the power of custom, and early habits. Let no Christian minister then despair of success, if only in earnest to promote this piece of reformation in the Church; to excite to which is the object of this Discourse; for such as may be induced to oppose it, will soon be ashamed of their opposition, which will prove as ineffectual, as it is indeed unjustifiable.

Farther, There are who seem to think, or act as if they thought, that the frequent, or seldom administration of the ordinance in question, and the retaining, or giving up such additional days and services, as present usage sanctions, is a matter of mere convenience, to be regulated purely by circumstances. They frankly own that the primitive practice was different from the present usage, for which they plead no scripture authority whatever; yet, because the church, or community of Christians to which they more immediately belong, observe it, and wish it to be continued, they think proper to acquiesce, and give themselves no farther trouble. But can we reasonably suppose, that the blessed Author of our sacred religion, who is a God of order, and consistency, and not of confusion, as in all the churches of the saints, would leave any of his ordinances to be moulded and fashioned by circumstances, which vary with the vicissitudes of time? To me it appears quite improbable, that a matter of such importance to his glory, and the happiness of his people, would be left on a footing so very vague and undetermined. Such a supposition is refuted by fact, the report of scripture admitted. Besides, he is a rock, and his work is perfect; which would not be the case, did it need any addition from man, to answer the ends which he intended. But even upon that supposition, the superadded days and services should be given up, because the circumstances that gave rise to them, and for a time pleaded in their favour, now no longer exist; and instead of promoting the benefit of the church at large, they evidently operate the contrary way. Hezekiah, when reforming his kingdom, brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; because the children of Israel continued to burn incense to it, and he called it in derision, Nehusthan, a thing of nought, 2 Kings xviii. 4. Gideon's ephod, tho' the expression of his piety, and gratitude to God, proved a snare unto himself, and to his house, and all Israel are said to have gone a whoring after it; which shews, that things in themselves indifferent, or praise worthy, may come to be so perverted from their original intention, as to require their discontinuance. It cannot be therefore a matter of indifference, or mere convenience, whether we conform to the will of our Lord, revealed in, or deducible from his word, and observe his ordinances according to his own intention; or act agreeable to the dictates of human wisdom, and the prescriptions of human custom. A conduct founded on such a basis, or regulated by such shifting principles, while it expresses so much deference to human authority, and local prejudices, seems far from respectful to the great Author of Christianity. It in fact says, that he has left us at liberty to model his institutions in some things, as may best please the generality, and comport most with existing circumstances; provided we retain their essential parts.

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Besides, it argues an opinion, that what we want in point of frequency, on the present plan, may be made up by increasing the attendant services. Were we to act upon this principle throughout, it is hard to say what form Christianity would ere now assume in our hands. But it cannot be a matter of indifference whether this ordinance be dispensed, in respect of frequency, or annexed observances, agreeable to the mind of its Author and the approved example of his church under unerring direction. It is not indifferent, either in respect of his glory, or our edification; for his ordinances have both these grand objects in view, and are wisely fitted, in their due observance, to promote them; while every deviation from his own institution, whether in defect, or excess, has a tendency to lessen these effects. Those who think it a matter of indifference, whether they conform to his will, and the example of his church, under the infallible guidance of his Spirit, or not, in respect to frequency of communicating, have only to carry the matter a little farther, and to plead, that it is a matter of indifference whether they observe it at all; for if we are justified in a partial regard to his will, when made known, why not in the total neglect of it? Caleb and Joshua were applauded for following the Lord fully; and that servant who hath access to know his master's will, and doth it not, or only by halves, and with additions of his own, to excuse his neglect, is counted worthy to be beaten with many stripes. The injunction to Christians, not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, seems plainly to imply a command to observe, or continue steadfast in every duty that made a part of the public service of the Church; and so much the rather, adds the apostle, as we see the day approaching—the day of Christ's final appearance to reward the zeal, and pious labours of his faithful servants; whence whatever respects the administration of Divine ordinances cannot be a matter of indifference.

It will perhaps be said, that all the services at present annexed to the dispensation of the supper, are proper in themselves, and enjoined at large in scripture; and therefore, may with propriety be observed in that connexion, tho' nothing be said to that purpose at the institution, or practised in the scripture examples of its administration. It is readily granted that these, duly observed, are very proper, yea necessary, in time and season; it is only the thrusting into a corner, or making merely occasional, an important duty, to which they are meant to pay an high compliment that is objected to, and meant to be guarded against. Would we think the Jewish church justified in making such additions to the passover, as would put it entirely out of their power to observe but once in seven, instead of once a year; tho' they could plead that they added nothing but what was commanded some where

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scripture, and so, upon the whole, of divine obligation, tho' not expressly annexed by their lawgiver to the celebration of that ordinance? It seems every whit as absurd to think to justify ourselves in the seldom performance of this profitable duty, by joining so many extra services with it, as it would be to attempt to crowd the duties of twenty into one Lord's day, omitting the observance of any till these elapse, and so imagine that we act up to the import of the precept, "Remember the sabbath-day to keep it holy." Every public service attached to this ordinance in scripture, as a necessary part or appendage, may, if I mistake not, be observed on the first day of the week; and hence, to affect to be wise, or strict above what is written, favours not of the wisdom from above. Happy they who condemn not themselves in what they allow.

Shall I suppose that the reproach attached to individuals, who oppose in religion what hath obtained the sanction of custom, and attempt to introduce what is branded as an innovation, weighs with any in the sacred office; in continuing the present practice, without any endeavour to restore the ordinance to the primitive simplicity of its observance? As it is good to be zealously affected in a good thing; so it is honourable to be reproached for it. The words of our blessed Lord, once and again repeated in the gospel, are sufficient to blunt or repel all the arrows of invective and reproach, when these are incurred in his service: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels." To be ashamed of his word, or institutions, or to decline standing up in their defence, he will account as being ashamed of himself. It is no just reason to forbear inculcating any doctrine of scripture, that it meets with opposition, and procures reproach. As the ordinance in question relates to Christ, and derives all its authority and efficacy from him; so in him alone do all the lines of divine truth centre, and have a firm consistence. He is the fountain of truth and grace, by whom they came; and the grand theme and end of every doctrine of the gospel. The truths even of scripture, when detached from him, prove but dry and lifeless speculations, a killing letter, instead of a life-giving spirit. Were we masters of all science, and could speak with the flowing diction of a Cicero, and the fire and vehemence of the Grecian orator, or the refined reasoning, and chaste eloquence of Paul of Tarsus; our hope of success must rest, not on any, or all of these qualifications, but on the pure, unadulterated doctrines of the word of truth, and the promised blessing of Heaven to accompany them. The ordinance of the supper hath this one excellency, that wherever it is administered at all, it must exhibit to the faith of God's people Christ and him crucified:

crucified: but various expedients have been found to exclude him from the doctrines of his word, or to hide from view their relation to him. For this perhaps, among other reasons, the enemies of the gospel, and of the Son of God, have always opposed the frequent enjoyment of this ordinance, or attempted to strip it of all its native beauty and simplicity. If the doctrines of religion are not learned as they are in Jesus, or in their relation to him, the mind must remain benighted; and after a long course of attendance on such instructions, a person may continue as ignorant of the knowledge of salvation as the very Heathens. Of this the modern Jews, who have the Old Testament in their hands, are a standing and melancholy proof. These remarks are not foreign to our purpose; for the word and ordinances of God have a mutual influence and dependance.

To suppose that a concern for our temporal interests, we being more dependent in this respect on our people than those who can boast of the security of a legal establishment, would induce any among us to oppose, or be less active in promoting what in our deliberate judgment we approve, would not be so respectful, nor do I presume to tax any with it; tho' the very best of men cannot divest themselves in the present state of every feeling on that head. Some may be induced to yield to the prejudices of the people in certain cases, in hope time and circumstances will open their eyes, that they may have it in their power to profit them in what they deem of greater importance; nor provoke desertion from their ministry, by holding forth truths which they think the people cannot yet bear, or urging the observance of duty in a mode to which they have yet their aversion. The wisdom from above, and the approved examples of scripture are profitable to direct in such cases. "He that walketh uprightly, (saith Solomon) walketh surely;" and experience confirms the truth of the observation, Honesty is the best policy. As in common life, so also in religion, a fair, candid and open conduct is the most calculated to secure esteem and acceptance. If enabled to have the glory of God, and the best interest of men at heart, and to act with a single eye to these great objects, we may securely commit all our temporal concerns to his care and blessing. The more we testify our love to our people, by promoting the means of their edification, tho' at the expence of increasing our own care and labour, the more may we hope to be beloved of them, when they are once brought to view the matter in the light of divine truth.

It may perhaps be urged, that unless all who are of the same persuasion in religion, were to adopt such a change in the usual mode of dispensing the supper, however desirable this might be in itself, no individual or Congregation can have a right to begin it; and that as this would be a work of time, it is safest, if not

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duty, to delay the attempt, till all come to be of one mind, when such a measure will be easily effected. This objection is more specious than solid. Whatever deference may be due to the prejudices of custom and education in religious matters, to such a sacrifice they can by no means have any just claim. Where there is no law, there can be no transgression, and consequently no just ground of offence. That the law of God forbids the object in dispute, few, if any will venture to assert. And never yet did any church, so far as I know, make any law against the frequent use of this ordinance; tho' many have been made to prevent the contrary. The national church in our own land never authorised her ministers to celebrate it seldomer than four times a year in borough towns, and twice in country parishes; and they may dispense it, if they please, every Lord's day, without violating any of her laws. And the Clergy of the established church, in the southern part of our isle, are obliged by her canons, to administer it once a month, if but a small number of their people express their wish to that purpose. All this tends to shew the opinion of professing Christians on the head; but if the law and love of Christ cannot constrain to the frequent observance of this duty, church laws are worse than in vain. Such being the case, surely the known candor and moderation of those to whom I now speak, would never impose a yoke upon any minister, or any Congregation under their inspection, which, to use a scripture simile, would make their little finger heavier than the thigh of such churches. Should any of our ministers, or their people, be bound up from acting agreeable to their own judgment in a case of this nature, till all those Christians, or detached congregations, with whom they stand more immediately connected, are brought to view the matter in the same light; would not this be to entangle them with a degrading yoke of bondage, and to put it in the power of every one, who might not choose to instruct his people on such a point, and also in the power of perverse individuals, for such will be found, to prevent the church from going on unto perfection, as we are exhorted, in this, or in any other part of Christian practice? If the nature of Presbyterian church government involve any such obligation, on those who submit to it, then Independents may plead, that it cannot be of God; because, say they, He cannot sanction a system of administration in his church, that would interfere with the enjoyment of his ordinances, according to his own will, and the example of his inspired servants; or preclude his people from acting up to their acquired light. But no Presbyterian church ever dreamed of this, or presumed to impose any such yoke.

With equal propriety might a man enter into his neighbour's house, and tell him, that he must not spread a table for his household, any oftner, or in any other mode, than he is pleased to set him the example. How ridiculous to suppose, that others may know better than a person himself, when he is in case to receive

his necessary food, or that they have a right to require he should conform to their example, as to the time and mode of receiving it, and to be offended, should he not comply! We often exhort our people to partake of the supper, and justly blame their neglect; and can it be then a fault to give them frequent opportunities of doing so in their own place of worship? Surely those who are pleased to partake of that ordinance more frequently, and in such a manner as they can overtake, from a sense of duty, and of their need of it, have a claim on the forbearance of such as may not yet see this to be binding on themselves, or who chuse to delay acting up to their convictions. What the apostle says in another case applies here with greater force: "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not *so frequently*; and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth: for God hath received him," Rom. xiv. 3. What he says elsewhere (1 Cor. xiv. 37, 38) merits attention, in reference to our subject; "If any man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you, are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." The apostle having been at due pains to instruct them in the knowledge of truth and duty, should any still retain their old prejudices and errors, and refuse to yield to the evidence of truth,—should they thus continue ignorant, let them enjoy their ignorance, the church of God must not be denied the knowledge of any truth, or the enjoyment of any spiritual privilege, in compliment to such. So thought and reasoned Paul, and the same argument is of force still. Let none then, with the means of knowing their duty within their reach, presume to restrict their brethren from observing it, or tax their so doing as untender, or uncharitable.

Is there no reason to fear, that a spirit of indolence, or indifference may prevail with some, who content themselves with observing things as they found them? They find this sufficient to secure the approbation of men, and the emoluments of their office; and tho' they may not in all respects be satisfied, yet they wish to make things as easy as possible on the old plan, rather than attempt a change that would approach nearer the scripture example than they chuse. They would be content to do away all the added services, but not to increase the frequency of dispensing the ordinance itself, as hath indeed been done in one province of the Established church†. In these days of degeneracy, a spirit of lukewarmness and formality is a great obstacle to a more frequent enjoyment of a privilege, which requires the exercise of faith, love, and other Christian graces; and supposeth a strictness of deportment proportionate to that frequency. No wonder therefore such a proposal should meet with opposition. Nor let it be objected

† Within the bounds of the Synod of Argyle, where, tho' the ordinance be dispensed but once a year, none is allowed to partake of it in a neighbouring parish.

ted, that a departure from the present mode would put an end to the friendly interviews, and Christian fellowship, both of ministers and people, on such occasions; for all that is valuable in these may be still preserved with improvement. Both have fellowship in the ordinance itself, acting in character, tho' they join not in one place; and how delightful to reflect, that so many myriads should be engaged at one time in the same solemn service! Other objections to this primitive practice, are equally unfounded, and easily repelled, as those adverted to above.

The bad effects of neglecting the mode of administering the Lord's supper, exemplified in scripture, or of deviating from it, are too many, and obvious, to escape the notice of any attentive observer. Where Tent-services are still continued, what a bustle do they occasion, as if we met, like the Jews of old, to celebrate a feast of tabernacles; I had almost said, in some cases, a feast to Bacchus! How many congregations are hereby thrown vacant, almost every alternate sabbath throughout the summer months! Eliab's sarcasm to his younger brother David applies here; "With whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?" The gross irregularities, too common on such occasions, have furnished copious materials to a late profane wit, in what he calls The Holy Fair. In ministers' families, some must be cumbered, like Martha, about many things, or much serving, while they should be caring for their souls. Their own fatigue, expence and loss of time, in travelling abroad, to the interruption of the duties of their charge, merit notice among the bad effects of the present laborious plan; tho' seldom, perhaps, adverted to by the people. Satan finds much employment on such occasions; and the instances of Sabbath profanation exhibited often at them, are neither few nor trifling. What a pity is it, that no congregation, in such cases, can enjoy the benefit of this ordinance, without depriving thousands of the ordinary means of religious improvement, and occasioning themselves in return a number of silent sabbaths in their usual place of worship; while its Divine author hath made his yoke easy in this respect! But this pompous appendage is now pretty generally laid aside.

Have not seldom communions tended to introduce a laxness of discipline, a legal spirit among professors, and a corresponding formality, the very things they are pretended to remedy or prevent? The most erroneous or flagitious, will find in their hearts to approach a communion table once or twice a year, from motives known to themselves, and too often find free access, tho' they tread not the dust of the sanctuary, till the like occasion invite their return. Many seem to think, that the observance of certain days is sufficient preparation for the holy ordinance, and that a little seriousness at its approach, will atone for the liberties they may have taken during the long interval betwixt two communions. Like the Jews of old, they place a merit in bowing down their

head as a bulrush for a day; and are ready to say, "Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not?" while in the day of their fast they find pleasure, and exact all their labours; yea perhaps, fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness. By means of the present mode, Christians are effectually debarred from the frequent enjoyment of such a privilege; for due attention to their secular concerns will not permit their frequent attendance, tho' ministers could be had to dispense it in the usual form. In vain is it urged, that those who wish to enjoy it frequently, may have an opportunity in neighbouring congregations; for what is to become of the aged and infirm who cannot travel? Are they to be deprived on this account of the children's bread, while their years and infirmities claim peculiar sympathy and attention? Amidst the external services annexed to the ordinance, people are too apt to lose sight of its design and spiritualis, and to esteem it great in proportion to the outward pomp and solemnity which attend it; like the Jews, who doated on their showy ritual, to the neglect of its spiritual import, or the Roman catholics, whose pretended veneration for their consecrated host, hath degenerated into adoration. By seldom dispensing it, the very worst of men are emboldened to claim access to the Lord's table; whereas a more frequent administration would remove this temptation. The present mode teaches men to make a distinction, where in reality there is none; for they can join abroad without attending, perhaps on any of the added days; while they would scruple to do so at home, at least, if these days were not at all observed.

And can it be said, that the assembling together of a number of ministers on such occasions, tends to promote their spiritual mindedness, and mutual edification? Of this they themselves are the best judges, and let their experience speak. Have not the bad effects of the present usage proceeded a great length, when if the apostles of our Lord were now alive, the greater part of professing Christians in these lands would not hold communion with them, unless they adopted the mode sanctioned by custom, and laid aside that which they practised in their own day? This of itself, one would think, is sufficient to reach conviction of the impropriety, and bad effects, of the present scheme. Does it not also produce bad effects, when it leads people aside from the word of truth, as the ground of their religious observances; and when instead of giving their reasons from that infallible standard, with meekness and fear, they are transported with a kind of furious zeal without knowledge, that shuts their ears against the voice of reason and truth, and their minds against conviction? Hence a minister of the gospel cannot declare, what he hath learned from the sacred oracles, as truth or duty, and propose the practice of it without exposing himself to much opposition, reproach, and misrepresentation. These are some of the disagreeable effects which flow from the present burdensome custom, to which other

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might be easily added. Let me now proceed to some Improvement.

Beloved Fathers and Brethren, solemn is the charge, many and great the obligations, and powerful the motives, which we have to be faithful, in the performance of the duties of our holy function. "Go and preach the gospel to every creature, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world." "Go preach the preaching that I bid thee"—"speak to the people all the words of this life." "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." As watchmen on Zion's walls, we are bound to watch over the souls of men as they who must give an account; and should any perish, thro' our neglect their blood will he require at our hand. Hence Paul, having obtained mercy to be faithful, saith to the elders at Ephesus, "I am free from the blood of all men." Of the false prophets of old, God saith, "But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings" Jer. xxiii. 22. They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars, and as the brightness of the firmament for ever. They obtain the dignified titles of the Salt of the earth, and the Lights of the world: but if that salt lose its flavour, our Lord tells us, "It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be troden under foot of men." And should these lights become "wandering stars, for them is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." Those stars that Christ holds in his right hand, shall shine by his reflected beams. Such as are workers together with God, shall behold in those who are reclaimed to him by their means, "their joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of their Lord at his coming." "Behold, (may each say) I, and the children whom the Lord hath given me." To whom he will reply, "Well done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joys of your Lord!" What powerful motives these to do, in the work of such a Master, whatever our hands find to do with all our might! Let us not then take the measure of our duty from the attainments either of the most eminent for piety, or famed for wisdom, who are only so in part; but from the word of God, for such great men, saith Elihu, *are not always wise*, in every branch of divine science; *neither do the most aged and experienced, in all points understand judgment*. The Scribes and Pharisees were taxed by our Lord, with not going in to the kingdom of heaven themselves, and with hindering those who would enter;

ter; a conduct of which none of his servants, acting in character, will be guilty, with regard to any part of his known will.

What now remains, Worthy Fathers and Brethren, but that we should, each in his own sphere, labour, without delay, to instruct our people from the word of God, in a matter so essential to his glory and their happiness; and to bring them to observe the primitive practice, as we would wish to see primitive Christianity revived in our day? Do any of us think the rulers of the earth blame-worthy for declining to reform the abuses which may exist under their administration, till these become too serious and extensive to admit of remedy? Let us beware of giving room to retort the old sarcasm, Physician, heal thyself: for reformation, like charity, should doubtless begin at home. Let us beware of a timid spirit, and of losing our zeal for what we approve, in a false, prudential delicacy, which is ever ready to cry, "A lion is in the way," when any thing is proposed that requires some exertion, and may meet with opposition from some whom we would be sorry to offend. With such an object in view, obstacles and opposition are to be expected; but these, thro' the blessing of God, and patience and perseverance on our own part, may be surmounted. Even the temper of the times is favourable to the attempt, and is likely to become still more so. Tho' it were otherwise, this could furnish no valid objection, as appears from that scripture aphorism, "He that observeth the winds will not sow." Even things of a most forbidding aspect have, by the wisdom and power of Zion's mighty King, "rather tended to the furtherance of the gospel." We know at what period the word of the Lord so mightily grew and prevailed. God works by means, in securing the improvement of his church and people, in regard both to faith and practice; nor are we to leave this to the slow operation of providential events, while we have the word of the gospel in our hands, and are set for its defence. When God is working in his Providence on the minds of men, by effecting a revolution of sentiment in various respects, it becomes his servants to co-operate, by holding forth the word of truth, and the approved practice of the primitive Church, as an example that claims our imitation. This is the more necessary, because when the minds of men are left to their own native progress in such cases, it is a thousand to one but they will fly, as in the case of political revolutions, to the opposite extreme; not having been properly enlightened, and gradually influenced by the knowledge of the truth. Thus they are led to attach the worst ideas to the system under which they received their early education, and to think they cannot recede far enough from it; so that too much deference to popular prejudices in religion, must prove prejudicial to religion itself, and, in the end, to the respectability and subsistence of its public teachers, as we see amply verified in our own day. The cordial belief, and steady practice of all known truth and duty, is the di-

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rect, and indeed the only way to secure respect, success and stability to our order: "If ye will not believe, (said God by his prophet) surely ye shall not be established." It is good to abound in the work of the Lord; "for God loveth a cheerful giver," and "he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."

What remains then, but that laying aside too common excuses, we put our hand to the work without delay? In such an important concern, the exhortation applies, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." The example of David, when he felt conviction of duty, merits our attention: "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Some may perhaps wish to wait till their seniors go before them; but this is false modesty, which should not influence our conduct in the service of God: for our obligations to serve him with all our heart, in every instance of known duty, are not to be measured by the number of years which have gone over our head. Procrastination is the thief of time, and argues a culpable indifference. What is difficult in its observance to-day, may become more so to-morrow; and while a devil exists in the universe, and hath access to work in the hearts of any of the sons of men, such an attempt will meet with opposition, let it be put off ever so long. Besides, can we tell what a year, month, or even a day may bring forth? and should we neglect to attempt such a duty when we can, God may justly deprive us of the opportunity when we would. Can it yield us comfort in a dying hour, that we have felt conviction for years, respecting the object in question, but never set ourselves in earnest to reduce it to practice, thro' fear of the people, tenderness to their prejudices, or some other reasons equally unfounded? To be "forward to every good work," of which that in question is doubtless one—"always abounding in the work of the Lord," ranks high, both as a ministerial, and a Christian virtue. Soon will our opportunities of "serving the will of God in our generation,"—or "seeking the profiting of many that they may be saved," be for ever at an end. Every argument that tends to recommend the object at all, tends also to excite to speedy endeavours to secure it. The glory of God—the constraining influence of the Redeemer's love—our infinite obligations to him—the vast benefit which may accrue thence to the souls of many—our own responsibility at the bar of God, for the use we make of the privileges and talents now entrusted to us—and the exalted honour and felicity which await those who are found faithful to the death, are considerations which should have their due weight with us all, in the discharge of every part of our sacred function, and excite to speedy diligence in promoting the grand object of the present Discourse. Trusting to your wonted candor, and good will to the sacred interests of true religion in the world, I make

no apology for embracing this opportunity of directing your attention to such a subject, only expressing my regret, that the mode of discussing it was not more worthy of the occasion. None however are more ready to excuse defects than those who are ablest to discern them.

It may perhaps be expected, I should say something to the people assembled on this occasion, before I dismiss the subject. Having consumed so much of your time already, I must at present, Christian friends, deny myself that pleasure. I can only therefore offer you a thought or two. You will readily grant that it is your duty, as the professed disciples of Jesus, to receive and practise, with meekness, whatever your pastors are bound to teach and inculcate, in the discharge of their important office. Their duty, in any one instance, clearly established from the word of God, you cannot for a moment be at a loss to know what part you yourselves are bound to act. The obligation is reciprocal, and the duty, in one form or other, the same. Let it not then be said, that your prejudices, in favour of a custom not sanctioned by scripture, constitute the greatest bar to the enjoyment of the holy ordinance of the Supper, agreeable to the will of its Author, and the approved example of his Church. By opposing a measure so desirable in itself, you act against your own interest, lay a temptation in our way, not easily surmounted, and offend our common Lord and master. If we neglect our duty in this particular, or are backward to the performance of it, let the blame be our own. Beware ye of acting in such a manner as will devolve a principal part of it upon you. Trace the articles of your faith, and the mode and duties of your worship, to the word of truth; and whatever does not correspond to this, whether in matter or circumstances, reject as unfounded. Love to hear both freely discussed, look up to God for light and direction, and neither receive, nor reject, till you have with care and candour consulted that unerring rule. "Walk before God, and be perfect," "continuing steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Study to have your path, in regard both to knowledge and practice, like the light of the morning, which shineth with an increasing brightness to the perfect day.

Let me now conclude, by expressing my cordial wishes, in the language of holy Paul: Let us therefore, as many as be perfect be thus minded: and if in any thing we be otherwise minded, may God reveal even this unto us; and give us understanding of all things, that we may prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God, in all the parts thereof, and be disposed from the heart, to give it a willing and ready compliance!

TO THE RELIEF CONGREGATION, DUNDEE,

*with whom the Author stands connected as their Pastor,
and other Christians into whose hands this small Tract may come.*

DEAR Friends and fellow Christians, I embrace this opportunity of addressing you, and recommending to your serious attention the subject of this Publication, which was undertaken solely for your benefit. In matters of everlasting moment, it becomes every one to inquire candidly for himself. Custom and early habits have a surprising influence over the human mind, from which even the candid and intelligent are not all at once delivered. Never is this influence stronger than where religion is concerned, which argues the sense men generally entertain of its superior importance. What we have been accustomed to see practised from our youth, have also often joined in, and to which we are taught to attach reverence, as an important part of our religious services, we too naturally receive as of divine appointment, without due inquiry into the real grounds, or once calling the truth of these in question. Tho' this conduct cannot be justified, I mean not to upbraid you with it; for I too, have yielded to the power of the same principle, till time and reflexion, in respect of the ordinance of the supper, cured of this too common prejudice. Our heavenly Father knoweth our frame, and pitieth our frailties. If any of you (says he) lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." He will not reproach us with our past mistakes, so be we are willing to receive his instruction, and use proper means for that purpose, under a due sense of the imperfection of our own understanding; and in this he has set us an example to regulate our conduct towards one another. As disciples of Christ, which we have the honour to profess ourselves to be, we must be willing to learn of him, who is meek and lowly in heart, in all things pertaining to life and godliness, and to follow on to know him; and should we decline this in any instance, we act unworthy of that character, and, persisting in such conduct, forfeit all its privileges. This is peculiarly the duty of all in the sacred office.

When ordained to the ministry, and called by you with whom I stand now connected in Providence as your pastor, or who have since owned me in that relation, I became sacredly bound to declare whatever I believed, on scripture authority, to be truth or duty. The measure of your attainment in either, was not to be the standard of my future ministrations among you, tho' we are to act as if we had already attained, or were, in this re-

speēt, already perfect; but a more certain and invariable rule, to which we do well to give heed. That rule asserts, in express terms, that we here see but darkly and as thro' a glass, and know but in part; which supposeth room for improvement; and hence we are expressly enjoined to go on unto perfection, and to follow on to know the Lord. We disclaim, in theory, the pretended infallibility of his Holiness at Rome; yet act, in many cases, as if we believed ourselves really possessed of it. Hence, tho' ministers are called to instruct and guide in the great concerns of our faith and religious practice, how few are disposed to hear them any farther than the doctrines which they advance comport with their own preconceived opinions, and the duties they recommend agree with what custom hath prescribed; as if this, and not the word of truth were the decisive rule of their conduct. This may indeed proceed from a principle blame-worthy only in its extreme, or perversion, a concern for the faith once delivered to the saints, of which most men are ready to flatter themselves they are already in possession. It is the not taking due pains to ascertain this, or the taking it for granted, because so many others have thought so before us, and so many think so still, that is blamed; for our faith and practice are not founded on a just and rational basis, till they result from our own conviction, after free and impartial inquiry into the grounds upon which they ought to be built. Does he not then act the part of a friend, who exhorts to this inquiry, and offers us his best aid in pursuing it?

Before I came among you, you had full access to know my sentiments on the important point in question, of which I made no secret. The hope of your readiness to reduce it, so soon as convenient, to practice, constituted one of the leading motive in accepting your call. It gives me now unfeigned pleasure, to find my hope, in this instance, so well founded. Tho' some may blame your conduct, in falling in so readily with a practice not yet sanctioned by general usage, which, I trust will however be ere long the case; yet I venture to say, you have by it done yourselves real honour. Charity obliges me to hope, that your conduct is founded upon conviction, because you never propose to adopt the wished for alteration, till you heard its conformity to scripture evinced, and the objections made to it answered to your satisfaction. This being the case, the present publication may in regard to you, be deemed superfluous. Not so however: for it is well known, that truths which produce conviction when heard cannot yet be recollected or brought forward as occasions may require. That you may then have it in your power to see at leisure the propriety of the step you have taken, and be able to give reason for it to others, who may call that propriety in question, it was thought proper to publish the ensuing Dialogue, along with the preceding Discourse.

Some few among us still profess scruples on the head, and it is hoped, they may find benefit from perusing both, if the knowledge of truth and duty be their sole object. As uniformity in the knowledge and practice of these, so far as attainable, is much to be desired, especially among our Christian brethren with whom we stand more immediately connected, both are published for their sake also; and should they condemn, or give opposition to our conduct in this instance, without deigning to give these a calm perusal, when once put within their reach, their own conduct will be quite inexcusable. But I hope better things, and would gladly persuade myself, that many may be thence brought to view the matter in the same light as you now do. I have for some time entertained a desire of publishing something on the subject, to aid the inquiries of those I was bound to instruct, which hath been hitherto, one way or other, delayed; and my not having done this sooner, was the principal reason why I did not, at a more early period, attempt to introduce the practice now so harmoniously adopted. Others may be induced to give it a patient hearing; for a variety of circumstances concur to shew, that such a publication is not at present unseasonable. The coming of the Desire of all nations will be preceded by the shaking of them, and this shaking shall affect not earth only, the political state of the world, but also heaven, or the state of the church; whence "the removing of those things that are, and may be shaken, as of things that are made," or manufactured by human wisdom and power, to answer certain purposes, "that those things which cannot be shaken may remain;" "for the word of the Lord endureth for ever."

With regard to other Christians, whether in our own connection, or of other Denominations, who may favour these sheets with a candid perusal, I would only beg of you, Brethren, as professed Friends to truth, and to the Lord Jesus, that you would consider the object in view, the reasons also which are urged in support of it, and the interest you yourselves have in it, with that cool and serious attention, which the importance of it deserves. As the prejudices of the people constitute the chief, if not the only obstacle that the greater part of ministers urge against the important piece of reformation proposed; let your conduct manifest, that this objection is either unfounded, or that these obstacles are far from being insurmountable. Examine and judge for yourselves, and having seen the matter in the light of divine truth, urge your Teachers, if necessary, to copy the scripture example, instead of opposing a return to the primitive practice. It is humbly hoped, that you may here find all that is material on the subject; at least, enough to satisfy a candid mind, of which every real Christian should be possessed. Such ought to be the more zealous in the practice of this, and every other duty, because iniquity and infidelity abound, and the love of many wax-

eth cold. The love of God and our Brethren, so rare, alas! in our day, can never be revived, without a revival of this Christian practice. Let love to him govern in our hearts, and his truth find free access to the mind; and then will Christ's love to us constrain to continue stedfastly in the observance of this duty, drawing with cords of love to obey his dying precept, "Do this in remembrance of me." Is it becoming the Christian to act, in regard to this ordinance, like the great of the world, in their distant and formal visits, in which real friendship hath little share? A hungry person welcomes an invitation to a well covered table, and a dutiful child rejoices in finding frequent access to the presence of an affectionate parent whom he loves. Does our Lord address his Church, "O my dove that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely;" "eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved?" and shall any of his people be alarmed at the very proposal of giving them more frequent opportunities of enjoying this important privilege at the children's table, as if some strange thing was going to befall them? Do persons need entreaties and exhortations to come often into the presence of the friend whom they affectionately love, while they feel the influence of that constraining principle, and are fully assured of his friendship and cordial welcome? This is not usual in the common intercourse of life, nor is it very consonant to the experience of a Christian. It is unworthy of a Christian to study the lowest measures of grace and duty with which he may go to heaven: for "the liberal sort deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." But I must caution you not to suppose, that I am pleading against the duty of fasting, provided it be such a fast as the Lord hath chosen; or against opportunities of hearing the gospel on week days, which should not be confined to certain times and seasons; for it is to be regretted, that there is, upon the whole, little of this among Christians. What I blame is, and beg it may be remembered, the combining so many services with the celebration of the supper, as render the frequent enjoyment of it impracticable both to ministers and people; while we cannot make it appear from scripture, that these services are in the least necessary to its due observance, or that men have a right to make them so, from such reasons of expediency as they may be able to assign. So far as we connect what the Lord hath not connected with his service, and by that means put it out of our power to observe it as we ought, we are guilty of will-worship. Once admit that Christians have a right to form such combinations in the service of God, tho' of things in themselves good and lawful; and the transposition is easy and natural to all the holy days and rites of Prelates and Popery.

But if you are not brought, upon weighing the subject in the balance of the sanctuary, to view it in the same light with the Author, of which he does not despair, if you bring to the perusal of the help here offered you an unbiaſſed mind; it is hoped, you will at leaſt deem him and his people entitled, in this particular, to your Chriſtian forbearance; while they uſe not their Chriſtian liberty for a cloak of licentiousneſs. Let every man be firmly perſuaded in his own mind, and act accordingly, that he condemn not himſelf in that which he alloweth; having previously uſed the proper means for attaining ſuch perſuaſion. And let us all learn to exerciſe that charity which "ſeeketh not her own," is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth in the truth," &c.

I have inſiſted too long on theſe things; but where the mind is under any bias, there is need of line upon line. The form of Dialogue was choſen as ſuited to the nature of the ſubject, and moſt apt to convey inſtruction. Tho' the price of paper hath of late greatly riſen, yet the price of this pamphlet is made purpoſely very moderate, that there might be no bar of this nature in the way of its circulation.

That you, my conſtant Hearers, and every Chriſtian who ſhall favour this Tract with a candid and attentive peruſal, may be enabled to profit by it, and every other mean of religious improvement you enjoy, is, and, I truſt, will be, as in duty bound, my ſervent wiſh and daily prayer. "Now the God of patience and conſolation, grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Chriſt Jeſus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt! Wherefore receive ye one another, as Chriſt alſo received us; to the glory of God." Commending you, Brethren, to Him, and to the word of his grace, and this ſmall attempt to promote his glory, and the edification of his people, to his patronage and bleſſing, with whom it is nothing to help, with them that have no power, in which, I hope, you will cordially concur,—I remain,

Your affectionate Friend and Servant
in the goſpel of Chriſt,

N. D.

DIALOGUES

On the Duty of Frequent Communicating, &c.

With Answers to Objections made to that Primitive practice.

DIALOGUE I.

Hearer. I Beg the favour, Sir, if you are at leisure, to converse with you upon a certain subject, which hath given me of late no small concern.

Minister. I make you very welcome; for I wish to give always ready access to any of my People, and deem it not only my duty, but also my honor and pleasure, to aid them in their serious inquiries, so far as in my power.

Hear. When I heard you express yourself from the pulpit on that subject, you were pleased to invite those who had doubts, respecting the propriety of what you then recommended, to come and wait upon you in private, in order, if possible, to have these removed. I am hence encouraged in the present application, tho' I should encroach, perhaps, a little upon your time and patience.

Min. If I mistake not, I perceive to what you allude; and cannot but commend your conduct; for many, tho' they should happen to be dissatisfied with what they hear their Pastor advance in public, instead of applying directly to himself, in a friendly manner, for an explanation, he is perhaps, the very last person, to whom they complain; so that he is left to learn their sentiments and complaints from other quarters.

H. I own, Sir, this may be too much the case with some inconsiderate persons; but such a conduct is, in my opinion, not only a breach of that duty which every Christian owes his Pastor, but also a real injury to themselves and others, as it hinders the great ends of edification. Therefore, having owned you in that relation, and sat with pleasure, and, I humbly hope, with some profit under your ministry, and also received the ordinances of the gospel from your hand; I could not think of rashly withdrawing from the Congregation, or indulging offence at what you advanced contrary to my sentiments, without giving you previously an opportunity of expressing yourself more fully. All this, I think, a public teacher has reason to expect and require in such cases.

M. I wish all that bear the name of Jesus were so disposed, tho' there be nothing in such conduct but what a due diffidence of our own understanding, and a humble, teachable disposition will inculcate. I beg you will make free to declare, without reserve,

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your sentiments and objections on the point which gives you concern; and if I cannot satisfy you, I persuade myself we shall part good friends. For my own part, I desire that truth only may determine, in which I have as much at stake as any of my people; and where this speaks, from what I have access to know of your character, I trust you have an ear to hear, and feel a disposition to obey. But let me hear what the subject is you have in your eye, and what you heard me advance from the pulpit respecting it, which gave you offence, and which you now wish, in a friendly manner, to discuss.

H. I heard you, Sir, say, when discoursing on the character of the church of Laodicea, That the seldom dispensing and receiving of the Lord's supper, was one of the marks or symptoms of the lukewarmness of ministers and people in the present day; and also that we have deviated far from the example of the apostles and first Christians with regard to this ordinance. I have heard you also express a wish, that it were more frequently enjoyed among us, and seeing this cannot be with all the present days and services, that these might be laid aside, at least occasionally, as making no part of that ordinance, or as being no way essential to its proper observance. I understand also that something of this nature is in agitation, and that many of your people seem to incline that way. If I have mistaken, or misrepresented your sentiments, you can set me right.

A. What you have said is correct enough; for I recollect that I have expressed myself to that purpose, if not in these very words; and also allow that many in the Congregation, if I am not mistaken by far the greater part, are not averse to my sentiments on that subject, and indeed wish to see them soon reduced into practice. But you have no doubt a right, as also every individual, to judge for yourself; and since you view the matter in a different light, must have some reasons that weigh in your own mind, which I shall be glad to hear: for while we should study unity in things necessary, we should also learn to exercise forbearance in many things, and the amiable virtue of charity in all, without which they would profit us nothing.

H. Mistake me not, Sir, as if I meant, by this application, to blame you for differing from me and many others, on this point, or for declaring your sentiments openly from the pulpit; for I conceive that every teacher of Christianity ought to do the same, in every thing that he judges interesting to the glory of God, and the edification of his people. Tho' I look upon the ministers of religion to be as liable to err as other men, and more hard, perhaps, to be reclaimed from their errors; yet as I must consider myself also as fallible, I determined neither to receive nor reject what you seemed so persuaded of, till I could have an opportunity of hearing your reasons, and the objections which I at present have to such a plan answered to my satisfaction.

M. To

M. To all this you have an undoubted claim; and I would be sorry to learn, that either you, or any other person, gave implicit credit to my word, in a matter in which every one is called to examine and judge for himself, and to see with his own eyes; for we have no title to lord it over our Brethren, whose servants we are in the cause of our common Master. But who shall determine the point in difference betwixt us, as every one seemeth to himself in the right, till his cause is tried by some certain and agreed on rule. Both of us being alike fallible, and in danger also of being misled by prejudice, passion, a too great deference to human authority, and the religious customs of our Country, or some other like causes, can we appeal to any, with such propriety, as to God himself speaking in his word?

H. Tho' I highly respect the present practice, because adopted by our wise and pious forefathers, and have been accustomed to it from my earliest years; and because I am also persuaded it has been the mean of doing much good, for which reasons I cannot consent to the giving of it up without conviction; yet I can have no reasonable objection to refer the matter, as you propose, to the decision of Scripture: for if it cannot be thence defended, I shall not plead for its continuance, or against any alteration that may be found more agreeable to that unerring rule. I must however candidly confess, that I never began till of late, to look into the New Testament concerning it; but took it for granted, that what hath been so long practised by so many worthy ministers and Christians, must correspond to the word of God, and the standards of the Church.

M. I fear you are not singular in this, tho' every one may not be disposed to make the same candid acknowledgment; for tho' I have been so long employed as a public teacher, yet I must confess, it hath been too much so with myself; and therefore ought to bear with you and the like of you, who have conscientious scruples on the subject, but are willing to be taught the way of God more perfectly. Nought but oblinacy, or humour in opposing or rejecting the means of instruction, can cut off from a claim to such tender usage. The reasons which have produced conviction on my mind, I am ready to give to every one that asketh them, leaving these to their intrinsic evidence and native operation.

H. I suppose these reasons were derived from the word of truth, to which you profess to pay so much deference in these matters.

M. I must own it was rather the reading of some Tracts†, written

† The tracts referred to, are, one supposed to have been written by the late Mr Thomas Randal, who died minister at Stirling, entitled a Letter to a Minister of the Church of Scotland, from his Friend, concerning frequent communicating, &c. —And

written upon the subject, of which you may have a perusal, that first led me to question the propriety of the present custom, and to consult the passages in the New Testament where the ordinance

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—And the other, a Dissertation on Frequent Communicating, by Dr Erskine, one of the present ministers in Edinburgh. These two valuable pieces were written in order to remove prejudices against an Overture of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, concerning the more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, bearing date, October 5th, 1748. They contain so much useful information on the subject as must satisfy every candid person; whence, it is to be regretted that they are not more generally known. The Overture came before the synod, in consequence of a proposal from the Presbytery of Glasgow. The Synod appointed a select committee of their number to consider said proposal, and give in their report, with part of which I here present the Reader.

"The committee humbly propose the following articles to the consideration of the very reverend synod: wherein they are unanimous in their judgment.—That the general proposal from the reverend presbytery of Glasgow, deserves the serious regard and attention of the Synod.

That it would have an evident tendency to the reviving and promoting of true religion, that the Lord's Supper should be more frequently administered among us, than what generally obtains, that holy ordinance being celebrated only once a year in each parish, (excepting in a few places) and, in some parishes, but once in two years:—That, if this be allowed, we must add, that the manner in which this holy ordinance is commonly administered among us, greatly obstructs the more frequent administration of it; and particularly the number of sermons on such occasions, and the many parishes thereby laid vacant on the Lord's day, are accompanied with several great inconveniences, if not also, too often, with scandalous profanations of that holy Day.

That from all this the committee are of opinion, it would be for the interest and honour of religion, that some method were devised, whereby these inconveniences and abuses might be avoided, and the Lord's Supper more frequently celebrated, agreeably to the word of God, to the Apostolic practice recorded therein, to the practice of the primitive church, and that of all other Protestant churches, as well as to several overtures and acts of assembly of this church in former times.

That, in the opinion of the committee, it would answer this purpose, if the Lord's Supper were celebrated at least four times a year, in every parish; and that only one day in the preceding week, either the Friday or Saturday, were employed in public fasting or preparation, &c. The synod, having heard and considered the above report, did approve of the same, &c." The above shews what sentiments that venerable body of men entertained of the present mode of dispensing the Supper, and its consequences; but the bigotted spirit of the time prevented their carrying the matter into effect. Indeed, the remedy which they proposed came exceedingly far short of a radical cure of the evil complained of, themselves being judges; and it was therefore just with God to leave it to miscarry in their hands: for the laws of the church should always correspond with those of her Head, tho' it may be difficult to bring men up to their observance.

The same grand object is occasionally adverted to, and recommended in other books and tracts; but one hath lately appeared on the subject which merits particular notice. It is entitled "An Address to the Christian people, under the inspection of the Reformed presbytery, concerning the more frequent dispensing of the Lord's Supper; by One of themselves." I regret not having given it a thorough perusal, till the preceding sermon was thrown off, and a part of the Dialogues transcribed for the press. It contains much useful information on the subject, and the Public are much indebted to the Author, who is a private person, for the laudable pains he has taken.

I am glad to find that the impression went off in a short time, and that the demand for it continued, whence a second edition is expected. With respect to historical facts,

facts,

—And

is spoken of, which confirmed what the writers of these tracts so ably maintain. You will be at no loss to turn up these passages at your leisure, of which I'll furnish you with a note before we part; and persuade myself, the attentive perusal of them will produce similar conviction. You can let me afterwards know if you think they give countenance to any such services.

H. I would be glad to know how you reason from the passages of scripture in question, in reference to the present custom. I should imagine, that if the services now attached to the Supper are, upon the whole, agreeable to the word of God, which few, if any, will venture to deny; that of course, their propriety in that connection must be admitted.

M. What you say seems at first sight to have some weight, and many so reason; yet tho' the first be granted, the last will not follow as a necessary consequence: for our great Lawgiver, and he alone, hath a right to say, not only what is duty in general, but also what is binding in particular instances. With regard to these parts of scripture where the ordinance is spoken of, I thus reason, If these make no mention of any such services as modern times have annexed to its celebration, then it is fair, if not unavoidable, to conclude that they are no way necessary in that connection; yea more, that the combining these with the ordinance is an intrusion upon the province of a higher, and an insult to his wisdom.

facts, I have availed myself in some cases of the information in this anonymous author's judicious extracts, not having all the books by me from which they are taken. The attentive perusal of the performance itself, as also of those mentioned above, is recommended to those who wish for farther information on the subject. Notwithstanding that the Public are already in possession of these valuable tracts, it was thought proper to add this publication to the number; as these, instead of superceding each other, may lend mutual aid and strength to the common argument. In this Publication, which was chiefly intended for the benefit of my own People, the objections both of Ministers and Christians, against the practice recommended are more fully discussed than in any performance which I have seen on the subject, which was deemed a material step towards the attainment of the object in view.

‡ The account of the institution of the Supper we have recorded in Matthew xxvi. Chap. from 26th verse. Mark xiv. from 22 ver. And in Luke xxii. 19, and 20th verses. The apostle Paul in the xith Chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, from the 20th verse, resumes the same subject, and records the institution as revealed to him by his Lord, with a view to rectify the disorders which unhappily took place in the church at Corinth. From this passage, as also from Acts ii. 42.—xx. 7, 11. where the ordinance of the Supper is allowed to be spoken of, the practice of the primitive Church respecting it, may be inferred. As these passages are particularly adverted to in the preceding Discourse, to which the Reader is referred, they are not dwelt on in the Dialogue. To avoid repetition as much as possible, the same care is observed throughout; whence such things as were formerly discussed, are either passed over, or but slightly touched, or placed in a different point of view; to which, it is begged, the Reader would advert, that he may perceive the whole extent of the argument.

H.

H. I cannot see the force of that reasoning, you will oblige me by making it somewhat plainer.

M. I shall endeavour to illustrate it by a familiar example, which appears to me in point. You have a servant, and no doubt expect, he should pay attention to your orders. Suppose then that you bade him do a certain thing often, say at stated times, in commemoration of some important event you wished to be held in remembrance, what would you think if he should content himself with doing it very seldom, perhaps not once for twenty times that you desired it to be done; yet, to make amends for this neglect, took it into his head to add to it other services, which you had at no time commanded to be observed in that connection, and the observance of which must put it quite out of his power to comply with your orders to perform it frequently? Let me ask you, would you not think that he had acted contrary to your express desire, and so incurred just blame, tho' he could plead, in vindication of his conduct, that what he had added, was proper in itself, and what you yourself required, tho' not in that connection? It is not difficult to decide upon the case.

H. I certainly would think he had neglected my instructions, and that his plea could not excuse him from deserved blame.

M. The application is then plain and easy to the case in hand; for it must be allowed, that we neither do, nor indeed can observe the ordinance of the Supper on the present plan, so often as the apostles and first Christians did, or any thing like it; and we may rest assured, God would not require of us impossibilities, nor allow our so compounding the matter with him. By your own acknowledgment then, we have departed from the instructions originally given, and cannot be exculpated by pleading the present numerous services in excuse; because the addition of these is a matter merely of our own devising, or handed down only by the tradition and custom of men; which should have no weight in the service of God.

H. I see some force in your argument; for whatever puts it out of the power of Christians to observe the ordinance as at the beginning, can with no propriety, I allow, be invariably attached to it, whether regarded as necessary or expedient. Your train of reasoning hath brought this concession from me; for if its sacred Author hath not, either by himself, or his inspired servants, either by example, or express instruction, connected what I came to plead for, I feel myself constrained to own, that it can make no part of our duty in that connection, and consequently, that it can be no sin to omit it, tho' being one of those things which appear to me to be still lawful, may in certain cases be very expedient.

M. I am glad to hear you express yourself in such a manner, and hopes you will be yet fully brought to own the whole truth. But I must maintain, that the services which modern times have an-

nexed to the celebration of the ordinance, are neither necessary nor expedient; because not connected to it by its author, and that they also throw an insurmountable obstacle in the way of the frequent enjoyment of such a privilege. I find no countenance given them in the gospels, where the institution itself is recorded, without one word of any such services; nor can I once suppose our Lord would omit the mention of them, if expedient to be observed in his Church; or the Evangelists in their account of it, did he speak of them at the time, or give any subsequent instructions respecting them. From such silence, the inference appears to me plain, and indeed, unavoidable.

H. I own there is something in what you have urged, tho' it never struck me in the same light before; for where can we find any thing pertaining to a divine ordinance, but where it is purposely spoken of? and if there be nothing said there of such days and services, to be observed in connection with it, it will not, I see, be easy to prove that they are necessary. I must own that our Lord would not neglect, in his own conduct, or in his instructions to his disciples, any thing necessary to be observed by his followers in future: for he was faithful in God's house as a Son. But then, tho' not necessary as an essential part, or indispensable circumstance of the ordinance, they may yet be very proper, and highly beneficial in their observance, which is all that I contend for.

M. I have heard you now more than once own, that they are not an essential part, or necessary circumstance, and, of course, no part of our duty, so combined; but hope you will yet confess, that instead of being very proper, and highly beneficial, they are a real incumbrance and great Bar to Christian edification, the very reverse of proper and beneficial. If they were either the one or the other, it is not easy to account for our Lord's silence respecting them, whose wisdom, and concern for the improvement of his people, would lead him to fix on the properest means, in order to secure the ends he proposed; and this much you have in effect just now granted. But if not necessary, why do so many insist upon them as if they were, and refuse to join without them, except in neighbouring congregations. Out of their own mouth, and from their own conduct, let them be judged; for what is not necessary to be observed, may without blame, or failure in duty, be laid aside. Tho' custom acquires among men the force of a law, and cannot be easily counteracted; yet does it seem a piece of presumption, to thrust out the ordinance itself from the place it occupied in the religious services of the first Christians, in order to make way for, or retain days of human contrivance, which is rendering their example of none effect, by our own traditional usage.

H. But does not the duty of self-examination, which we find enjoined by the Apostle, as a necessary pre-requisite, to the due participation

participation of the ordinance, and other duties recommended in pious practical books upon the subject, plainly imply the propriety, if not the necessity of setting some time apart from the cares and pursuits of the world, in order to look into our own hearts, to try our ways, and get our hearts and affections into a proper frame for such a solemn ordinance?

M. That duty is indeed then proper, but if confined to such times, especially where these occur so seldom, it will, I venture to say, be but poorly performed. The real Christian lives and walks by faith; for the life that he lives in this mortal state, is a life of faith on the Son of God; and it is not so much he that lives, as Christ that lives, and is formed within him the hope of glory. Acting in character, it will be therefore his habitual care and study to maintain a watch over his heart and ways, and to learn and ascertain his real state and character before God. The exhortation to keep ourselves in the love of God, and to make our calling and election sure, extends to the whole of our conduct; and must be understood of the fruits and evidences of our interest in the divine love, and in the election of grace, appearing habitually in our temper and deportment. As the juice of a living tree insinuates itself to the most distant boughs, and adorns these in season with foliage and fruit: so the divine life in the human soul actuates the whole man, and gives law to every part of the Christian's conduct; whence in eating, or drinking, or whatever else he does, he studies to do all to the glory of God. But the confining certain duties to certain occasions, or the attaching them with particular stresses to the reception of the ordinance of the Supper, appears to me to break in too much upon this uniform tenor of holy living. He who walks with and before God habitually, and keeps himself in his love, or under a lively sense of his interest in it, by a humble, watchful, circumspect and pious carriage, will be seldom at a loss to see his relation to Jesus as a friend, and his right thence to the children's bread; and he who makes no conscience of this, will not be prepared for a communion table, let him be ever so attentive to such periodical services. There is an analogy betwixt our natural and our spiritual life. The first is not maintained by loading the stomach with food at distant periods, with a long interval of abstinence, but by regular supplies, of which the returning cravings of nature remind us; and the last is cherished and supported in the same manner, by the frequent and pious use of all the means of grace, and of the Supper in particular, which are graciously ordained, and wisely adopted for that purpose. We would be alarmed should any propose to restrict us, respecting our daily bread, to the former mode; and yet, in respect of our spiritual wants, which are still more urgent, it hath been adopted to the full; whence our leanness and barrenness testify to the face from day to day against us. God fills

fills the hungry with good things; but sends the rich, those who feel not their need of his blessings, empty away.

H. I own the justice of your remarks in general, but if you mean to infer from them, that we are under no obligation to be more strict and diligent in the practice of religious duties, in the near view of such occasions, than at other times, I must beg leave to be of another mind.

M. I am far from meaning to insinuate, by the remarks which I just now made, that we are not to be under due concern to be found, thro' grace, in a proper frame of mind, in such approaches to God. What I intend to inculcate is, that such concern is not to express itself in a train of religious observances, which would in the nature of things, debar from the ordinance itself, but at very distant periods, which is actually the case where they prevail. And you will permit me to add, that pleading for these as necessary or expedient is, in effect, taxing the Holy Spirit speaking in the scriptures, because these nowhere mention them in that light; and he must be allowed to be as good a judge in such cases as any of the modern advocates for these usages. Let us suspect the propriety of a scheme that implies any such imputation.

H. But you seem to forget, Sir, that the apostle Paul is expressing on my side, when he saith, "But let a man examine himself, no doubt as to his right to; and fitness for the ordinance, "and so," having ascertained these, "let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." Here there is danger, and of course, need of care and solemn preparation.

M. But the question is, does the apostle say, that a day of fasting, and a day of preparation, publicly announced are necessary as you plead, for this purpose, every time the ordinance is dispensed, and that the very command to examine ourselves implies this? Does he and you agree in this? I believe not. The same duty is enjoined elsewhere in scripture, without any particular relation to the ordinance; and, by your mode of arguing, it should never be attempted, but when a public fast can be observed. Is not this somewhat like the Pharisees of old, who caused a trumpet to be sounded before them, to give notice that they were about to observe such duties? The great defect of some writers on this subject, the piety of whose intentions I call not at all in question, seems to be, the crowding of so many religious duties with the observance of this ordinance, as seem to plead for all the present days, and to impress an idea that something in our own power, or dependent on present exertions, is to be our preparation for the Lord's table; whereas we are told, that "the preparation of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." Hence, it is no uncommon thing to hear ministers urge on the hearers, on such occasions, a certain round of duties, as a necessary preparation.

preparation, which, however proper in due season, and as a part of their frequent exercise, not one perhaps of a hundred can then overtake; and hence such exhortations come to be regarded as words of course. I am afraid, that we ministers often in this respect, like the Scribes of old, bind heavy burdens upon other men's shoulders, while we ourselves scarce touch them with one of our fingers. Thus the table of the Lord, like mount Sinai of old, hath a fence of public and secret religious services placed around it, which may deter a serious conscientious Christian, or make him approach it with a trembling heart, conscious how far he fails in such preparatory services; which are dignified with the title of the preparation of the sanctuary; while the ignorant, the formal and hypocritical can break thro', or overleap it without remorse.

H. What would you then recommend, in order to remedy what you have just now blamed?

M. I would recommend as a safer and more scriptural, tho' not so popular a way, to all Christians, to have their loins habitually girded about, and their lamps burning, waiting in constant readiness for the coming of their Lord, studying to live in his fear, and to his glory all the day long; and to walk with, and before him, and be perfect. Thus when his table is spread, they may approach him, not with distant formality, and all the pomp and ceremony of religious etiquette, if I may be allowed the expression; but like children to a Father, who rejoices to see them, regards them, with all their disallowed infirmities, as olive plants around his table, and will make them welcome, because they are his children, and resemble him in gracious dispositions, and not because they have previously engaged in a number of bodily and mental exercises, which in themselves profit little, or at best, are no farther valuable, than they serve to promote the grand object in view, the pious commemoration of Christ's death; to which, as they are now managed, they are a manifest obstruction. But may not I appeal to those very persons, who lay most stress upon such services, and plead most strenuously for such days, in order to give them place; do they always improve them to such a purpose? Are they not often found as unprepared for that service, after having had so long an interval, and so many days to prepare for it, as they are on what is called ordinary sabbaths? But the silence of our Lord and his apostles on this head, if viewed in a proper light, might have saved all this reasoning; for had he seen such days to be necessary to the due observance of all the secret duties, which he requires of his people, previous to their participation of this ordinance, he would, no doubt, have provided accordingly. Where he and his apostles are silent, modesty should teach us not to supply, as if there were some defect in their conduct, or in the scripture account upon this head. Excuse my referring

ferring once and again to this circumstance, which appears so plain and conclusive. Can we suppose that Paul, in the passage to which you have referred, would entirely overlook to recommend the observance of a public fast, &c. when the Supper was administered, did he see this to be expedient or requisite, as you and many others plead, to the right performance of the duty of self-examination, which he had enjoined? This is the less probable, considering the object he had in view, which would not admit his overlooking any thing proper or necessary to the due observance of that sacred institution, that might have been passed over, or not so clearly expressed by those who wrote upon the subject before him.

H. Were it not that I have already trespassed, I fear, upon your time and patience, you would farther oblige me, by informing me of what you know, of the frequency observed in the days of the Apostles and first Christians, whether you think they partook of it so often as some maintain.

M. Your request is perfectly just and natural, and I promise to comply with it so far as in my power; but wishing you to reflect at leisure on what hath been advanced in the course of our conversation, I incline to defer this till, God willing, we have another opportunity. May the Lord the Spirit lead us to the knowledge of the truth as in Jesus, and the practice of every corresponding duty!

DIALOGUE II.

Hearer. **W**ELL, Sir, I am come to wait upon you, as proposed when we last parted, and hope you may find it convenient to spend an hour with me, while I make free to trouble you again on the subject of our last conversation.

Minister. I am very glad to see you, and will count it no trouble to resume the subject for your satisfaction, especially as I happen to have a little time just now at command, which is not always the case. Have you turned your thoughts to the passages pointed out to you at parting, and if you have, let me know whether you think they make for your purpose: for in their decision we should doubtless acquiesce.

H. I have consulted them with care, and must own that I could find nothing in them explicit in favour of the practice in dispute; tho', in my opinion, there be nothing against it either. One however, never candidly consults the word of God in vain.

M. You have seen the institution itself, as recorded by three Evangelists; the account Paul gave of it, as received by special revelation

revelation from his Divine master, with a view to correct the gross irregularities which unhappily prevailed at Corinth; and also, repeated mention of its observance in the apostolic churches, with circumstances that leave little doubt on the mind, respecting the mode of its administration. From all which, one would naturally expect to learn all that is necessary to be known, or practised in regard to it; seeing the "scripture is given for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works;" and, consequently, to this service which is a good work, and proper expression of christian love and obedience. In such cases, this is the only source whence to derive our faith, and the only rule by which to direct and determine our practice.

H. I am far from denying these things, and indeed suppose, few will maintain that the days and services in question are any way essential to the ordinance, or absolutely necessary to its due observance. My reasons for wishing to continue them, and against any change, go not so far back, nor turn upon that hinge; which, I dare say, is the case with many others.

M. I have indeed heard many frankly own the same thing, who yet pleaded in favour of such services, and against what they granted to be scriptural, at least in present circumstances, as if scripture examples were not intended for our days, as strenuously as if they were fully convinced of their divine obligation in that connection. This appears to me not a little inconsistent. Granting they are no way essential, or necessary, why object to the omission of them, or take offence at not observing them, in connection with the ordinance, which is raising them to the rank of essential, or necessary services. This conduct appears farther inconsistent, that they are omitted by thousands from year to year, who are deemed the most strict and zealous Christians among us, when they join in sister congregations, without giving any offence; as if such a circumstance could change the nature of the ordinance, or of the preparation necessary in the worthy receiver, both of which must remain at all times the same. Those therefore who think it proper, or necessary to adhere to the simplicity of the institution, and apostolic example, are doubtless justified in so doing, not only by the word of God, the rule of our faith, the ground of our christian practice, and the shield and sword of the Spirit, with which we may repel and parry the darts and attacks of the adversary; but also by the very concession of those who find fault with such adherence, which reflects upon themselves, while they counteract in practice what they grant and justify in theory. But dismissing these remarks, let us proceed to inquire what the practice of the first ages of the Church was, in respect to the Lord's supper, and, if as often represented, how it came in process of time into disuse.

H. I am glad you have adverted to that particular; for you will recollect I expressed my wish to that purpose at the close of our last interview, and long to have it gratified.

M. The word of God, and the early accounts which we have of the practice of the Church in these ages, are our only guides on this point; and they leave us not in uncertainty. Upon the first, it is unnecessary to be tedious, as every one can consult it for himself at pleasure. The time when our Lord instituted the ordinance, may be viewed as a powerful motive to our continuing stedfastly in the observance of it; the night in which he was betrayed into the hands of his enemies, and entered upon his accumulated sufferings. His words to his disciples at that time, may be also viewed in the same light: *Jesus said unto them, with desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.* Having ate the passover with them, when instituting his own supper, he said, *Do this in remembrance of me;* adding, as one of the Evangelists relates, *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day, when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.* The very recital of these words, one would think, would be enough to recommend frequency to all his disciples; for as he discovers in them a longing desire to drink of the bitter cup of sufferings, which was to issue in death for them; so also to institute the memorial of that death by bread and wine, as the seal of their pardon and acceptance, the mean of their refreshment and establishment, and the earnest, pledge and emblem of their perpetual communion with him in heaven; as also the grand mean of promoting their meetness for that holy and happy state.

H. I acknowledge the justice of these remarks, for while you were uttering them, I felt something of their force. If Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth, *desired with desire*, to eat his last passover, which was to usher in his bloody sufferings, with his disciples, and out of love to his people; with what ardency of desire should we desire, to use his own words elsewhere, to sup with him; and that he should sup with us in this ordinance, which affords such a striking proof and expression of his love!

M. In these words, *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom*, we have his promise, that he would not forget his friends when in that kingdom, but would give them the new joy of it, while engaged in this holy action so peculiar to that kingdom, whereof he himself obtained the fullness, in receiving, at his ascension, *the joy set before him.* On this sacred joy he makes his people share, by shedding forth into their hearts the Holy Ghost the Comforter, whose enlightening quickening and consoling presence, they may expect in this ordinance. Who hath ever tasted the consolations of the Spirit, the new wine of the kingdom, without feeling, at the same time, an

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ardent desire that Christ should sup with him at his holy table, and honor him to sup there with the Friend whom his soul loveth? From all this, one would imagine, the question with his real friends would rather be, How *often* would he have us to remember him, and glory in his cross before the world, by shewing forth his death at his table? How *often* may we hope for his promised presence and blessing in that sacred service; than how *seldom* may we partake of the Supper, and not forfeit the christian character? Our reason as men, the endearing ties we are under as Christians, and our character and duty as servants, all unite in reprobating the latter, and recommending such frequent remembrance of our Lord.

H I know some lay stress on the words of institution, "This do ye, *as oft* as ye drink it, in remembrance of me: for *as often* as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come," as if they recommended frequency; whereas to me they seem to import no more, than an exhortation or command to remember him, and shew forth his death, as the margin reads it, whatever time they partake of the ordinance, tho' it should not be once a year, or once in seven years; leaving the point of frequency to be determined by other circumstances.

M. I beg leave to think, with many others, that there is much more implied in the phrases *as oft*, *as often* than you seem willing to allow; for they appear to me to imply that frequent communicating is a duty, or at least to express an approbation of it. And I am persuaded you yourself will admit, that such terms may imply the lawfulness, at least, of frequent partaking; provided Christ be duly remembered, or the nature and design of the institution properly attended to. But that I may not found this on mere assertion, I beg your attention to a circumstance, which appears to me of considerable weight to determine the point of frequency. Tho' our Lord, in instituting his Supper on earth, as recorded by the Evangelists, said nothing of his disciples being often engaged in it, yet he does expressly in his special revelation of it to Paul, which is allowed to have taken place in the 44th year of the Christian era, which was eleven years after Christ's ascension to glory. May not this be therefore viewed as having a respect to that frequency, which he knew was then, and had been among his disciples for so many years, and also as a standing testimony of his approbation of it? Thus the indefinite phrases, *as oft*, *as often*, of which many take hold as a proof that the matter of frequency is left quite discretionary, may be viewed, in fair construction, as acquiring a fixed and determinate meaning, defined by the practice which then prevailed in the Christian church.

H. Viewing the matter in that light, I cannot but own that there is some force in the argument; for was the frequency then observed offensive to the Lord, there is reason to believe he would

have cautioned the Church, and given them some explicit instructions on that head.

M. Dr Erskine has favoured us with an extract, intended to shew, that a certain determinate frequency in communicating is enjoined in those words, *This do ye, as oft as ye drink, in remembrance of me.* The author from whom he quotes, observes, that the particle *it* is not in the original, and is not supplied in the vulgar Latin, the Syriac, or any of the old versions. He then goes on to argue thus: "If with our own, and most modern translations, we supply the particle *it*, and thereby understand the cup in the ordinance, this makes the command to signify just nothing. For what sense is there in this form of speech, *Drink this cup, as oft as ye drink it?* Or if we repeat the noun, instead of using the pronoun, *Drink this cup in remembrance of me, as often as ye drink this cup in remembrance of me.* We must therefore conclude that the Greek verb *pinete*, stands here absolutely, or by itself. And probably it is used in the *Hellenistical* sense of the word for feasting or banqueting, and so the text will run thus, *Do this in remembrance of me, as often as you feast, or, on all your holy feasts.* Now, for as much as every Lord's day was, even when this epistle was writ, already among the Christians a holy feast, therefore the command will come to thus much, *Do this, or celebrate my supper every Lord's day at least.* At least, I said, for other holy feasts they might have besides the Lord's day, but this most surely they all had. See 2 Pet. ii. 13. Jude ver. 12. compared with 1 Cor. xi. 26, 27. The plain meaning then of the command, is, *This do, as often as ye drink in remembrance of me,* I know that you, my disciples, will keep every first day of the week as a holy feast, with joy and gladness, in memory of my resurrection; and I intend so to order it. Now, see that every such day you remember my sufferings too, as well as my resurrection." This is the whole extract, and you see, that to make consistent sense, the particle *it* must be suppressed; and no sense appears more natural than the one given, which is known to be agreeable to fact.

H. I perceive that the supply of the particle, as in our translation, hurts the sense, or makes the passage an insipid tautology; but whether the sense given be the right one, will not pretend to say, tho' the known use of the Greek verb may go far to determine that.

M. That the verb is so used, there can be no doubt, and for the same reason that eating bread is often put in scripture for a full entertainment, and bread for all the necessities of life. It is worthy of remark, that our Lord himself dispensed this ordinance twice within the compass of a week; the night in which he was betrayed, and the first day of the ensuing week, to the two disciples with whom he conversed in their way to Emmaus. And it came to pass, says Luke, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread

and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them: and their eyes were opened, and they knew him. That this was no common repast, there is every reason to believe, from the actions and expressions of our Lord, with the effects which followed; and his first discovering of himself to them in the breaking of bread, seems to put a distinguishing respect on the ordinance. This circumstance is mentioned with particular emphasis; but I must refer for farther satisfaction on this point to the tract from which the above extract is taken; contenting myself with the author's inferences. "From this passage I remark, (1.) That the Lord's supper was the first religious institution, in which our Lord, after his resurrection, manifested himself to his disciples. (2.) That this ordinance was twice dispensed by Jesus himself in the space of a week. (3.) The evangelist's remarking, that it was dispensed to the two disciples the first day of the week, seems an intimation, that our Lord intended it should be a principal part of the sanctification of the *Christian Sabbath*." These remarks seem to me well founded.

H. I have not had an opportunity of consulting the book itself, you would oblige me by reciting some more observations from it.

M. I would do that with all my heart, the whole indeed is worthy of attention; but it would detain us too long from prosecuting what we proposed. However, I shall favour you with one or two more. Speaking of the conduct of the primitive Christians respecting the Supper, he saith, "It is probable their practice was founded on a New Testament precept, plain to them, tho' to us dark and obscure. But that obscurity will be no plea for our seldom communicating. For whatever difficulty there may be in finding an express precept, the *Apostolical Example*, which is as binding as a precept, is so clear and obvious, that he who runs may read it. And to me it seems something strange, that those who suppose the apostolical practice sufficient to change the *Sabbath* from that day on which God, in the *fourth Commandment*, had enjoined it to be kept, should pay so small regard to it in this instance, where it alters no command moral or positive, but serves to clear up a material circumstance in observing a precept, which otherwise might seem indeterminate."

He precedes his inquiry into the scripture passages respecting the supper, with the following remarks. "The two preceding paragraphs abundantly prove, that if frequent communicating cannot be urged as absolutely necessary, it may safely be recommended as highly expedient and beneficial. But, perhaps, upon inquiry we shall find in Scripture an express injunction of frequency; nay, of a precise degree of frequency in partaking of the Lord's Supper. For, that a prince should require a tribute to be paid him by every one of his subjects, and yet never express what sum should be paid, and at what time; is incredible. In like manner, I cannot easily bring myself to believe, that our Lord should require his Church, to the end of the world, to eat bread,

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and drink wine in commemoration of his death, without specifying how often he would have it done.—The Jews, tho' they understood not the utmost signification of the *Paschal* rite, yet had full directions how often, and in what day they were to sacrifice and eat the Lamb. If then the word of God has assigned no precise time for partaking of the Lord's Supper, will it not follow, that the gospel is more obscure than the law; and that our Lord, when he took the vail from off Moses's face, covered with a thicker vail his own?"

H. I see this author thinks to prove, that a precise degree of frequency, in partaking of the Supper, is enjoined in scripture; but to prove this, much more than assertion, or conjecture is necessary.

M. No doubt, and he has given much more, as all that have read his publication must own. I have also already assigned some reasons from Scripture to ascertain that point, and proceed to produce more.

H. I shall be glad to hear whatever you have to produce from so venerable an authority: for wherever God is pleased to speak, or signify his will, we should attend to his voice.

M. You have heard some remarks on the terms which appear to import frequency in the words of institution, *as oft, as often*, do you think they have any force, to establish that point, and overturn the position with which you set out, That they seem to you to import no more, in the connexion in which they occur, than an exhortation or command to remember our Lord, and shew forth his death, whatever time we partake of the ordinance, without any reference to frequency, leaving that to be determined by other circumstances?

H. I said so, yet grant, after what I have heard you urge, that something of the nature of frequency may be implied in such expressions; but I would wish to learn if the apostles and first Christians understood them in that sense.

M. We are to learn that from their own practice, which is the best comment on the sacred text, at least, the best proof of the sense in which they understood it. The first constituted church of which we read in the New Testament, the church at Jerusalem, made up of the three thousand converted at Pentecost by Peter's famous sermon, are said to have *continued stedfastly in the breaking of Bread*, along with other religious services; which imports constancy and frequency, insisting with zeal and stedfast perseverance in that duty, or waiting continually upon it, as appears from the use of the original word elsewhere; (Acts i. 14. v. 4. viii. 13. and x. 7. Rom. xii. 12. and xiii. 6.) if it does not intend a stated observance of it, whenever these other religious duties were performed on the day set apart for public worship. Strong and emphatic as the expression in our version is, it falls short

of the emphasis of the original. As there were stated periods for practising the other religious duties or services mentioned, is it not reasonable to allow, that there were fixed times also for observing this important service; and from the mode of expression, that these were the same? We would grant this, without hesitation, in any other similar case, where unbiassed reason was permitted to speak. Do not we reckon them defective in their profession of Christianity, if not living in direct opposition to its spirit and laws, who do not sanctify the first day of the week for the purposes of public worship? but is it not surprising that we should feel the force of a law so strongly in the one case, and that it should make so slender impressions upon us in the other, when both rest on the same basis—the example of the apostolic and primitive churches?

H. The passage on which you found these remarks, I confess, seems to countenance a greater frequency in the observance of the ordinance, than at present prevails with the bulk of professing Christians.

M. The weight of the argument rests not on a detached passage or two, or on expressions of dubious signification. We are told (Acts xx. 7.) That “upon the first day of the week, the disciples came together to break bread,” or to celebrate this ordinance; whence many infer, and not without apparent justice, that this was done by them every Lord’s day. As breaking of bread was the principal, so it appears, from the mode of expression, to have been the ordinary service of that day, and the very intention of the Christians coming together thereon. It cannot be alledged, that this was an extraordinary season and example, as that of the effusion of the Spirit at Pentecost; for this visit of Paul to Troas is allowed to have been in the 58th year of the Christian era, 25 years after that remarkable period. Troas was no very considerable city of Asia minor; nor do the Christians there appear any way extraordinary, either as to gifts, or attainments; yet even there, and at that period, the practice of frequent communicating appears to have prevailed; for Paul arrived at Troas on Monday, where he waited seven days, till the stated time for administering the Lord’s supper came, even the first day of the week. Some consider this as a clear proof that the ordinance began not then to be dispensed on week days, at least at Troas, and, probably, no where else, otherwise the apostle needed not have tarried whole seven days waiting an opportunity, when the necessity of his removal was so urgent. Tho’ the practice of communion on week days afterwards prevailed, yet we can trace no certain instance of it in the apostolic writings. Having access to know the practice of the primitive Church, in regard of the supper, this serves as a key to several passages in the New Testament which afford a farther confirmation of the point in hand. The passage which we have

have 1 Cor. x. 16, &c. *The Cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* hath been regarded as one of these. He speaks of the practice in the present tense, as a thing, statedly done by them, which makes the ordinance, tho' indeed a distinguishing privilege, - at the same time rather an ordinary than an usual practice in the churches of Christ. And in the discipline described 1 Cor. v. and concluded with the caution *with such an one, no not to eat*, seems plainly to import, that the characters mentioned ver. 11. were to be excluded from the ordinary or stated privilege of Christians, namely the participation of the Supper when administered among them. He is addressing them, not as private persons, but as a Church; and therefore the caution or prohibition, *not to eat*, cannot be restricted to, or indeed understood of their private tables, or common meals, as some have done, else Christians must go out of the world, or abandon Society.

II. But what do Commentators say of such passages; do they understand them as you seem to do? I have not often access to consult them.

M. So far as I am acquainted with them, they do, and I have consulted not a few of late upon such passages, which I cannot now tarry to turn up; contenting myself with producing the opinion of one or two. The pious and learned Dr Doddridge paraphrases the passage thus, "*And on the first day of the week when the disciples, as it was usual with them on that day, met together to break bread, that is, to celebrate the eucharist in remembrance of the death of our blessed Redeemer,*" &c. In a footnote, he is very full and explicit on the point, and on 1 Cor. x. 25. and in note g, and improvement he hath the following expressive remarks: "*This likewise do, as often as ye drink, (it) is commemoration of me, and in order to maintain the memory of my bleeding dying love in the church and the world. If we do indeed desire to preserve the memory of Christ's dying love in the world; if we desire to maintain it in our own souls; let us attend this blessed institution; endeavouring by the lively exercise of faith and love, to discern, and in a spiritual sense, to feed upon the Lord's body. We have at least as much need of the Lord's Supper as the primitive Christians had, not having so many advantages as they, to keep up the memory of Christ in our minds to quicken us to holiness, and to unite us in love.*"

H. No doubt, the advantages resulting from the frequent observance of the ordinance might be great, could it be so enjoyed with that reverence and solemnity which its nature requires. You have however given but the opinion of one commentator; others of equal note may differ from him; and even their agreement cannot of itself establish a fact; as they may mistake the

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sacred text, or thro' some prejudice or other give it such a gloss.

M. I might easily produce several others who maintain the same thing†, and none that I know venture to deny it, or to assert

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† The Reader will find the sentiments of several other Commentators, on this important topic, in the note which begins page 20th of this Tract, to which I beg leave here to add a few extracts more. The note from Doddridge, lately mentioned, runs thus: "*When the disciples met together to break bread*, (that is, to celebrate the eucharist.) It is strange, that Mr. Barclay, in his Apology, page 475. should argue from ver. 11. that this was only a common meal, and not the Lord's Supper. It is well known, the primitive Christians administered the eucharist every Lord's day, and, as that was the most solemn and appropriate, as well as the concluding act of their worship, it is no wonder that it should be mentioned as the end of their assembling; whereas, had nothing more than a common meal been intended, Luke would have hardly thought that worth mentioning, especially when, Paul being with them on a Lord's day, they would so naturally have something far nobler and more important in view, in which accordingly we find them employed; and it is quite unreasonable to suppose, they spent their time in feasting, which neither the occasion, nor the hour would well admit.—The argument which some overzealous Papists have drawn from this text, for denying the cup in the sacrament to the laity, was so solemnly given up in the Council of Trent, (Paolo Hist. lib. III. page 486.) that it is astonishing, any who profess to believe the divine authority of that Council, should ever have presumed to plead it again." Those who would infer from the cup not being mentioned in certain passages of scripture in connection with breaking of bread, that the Supper cannot be intended in these passages by that phrase, have the honor to coincide in sentiment with Quakers and Roman Catholics.

Mr Pool, in his Commentary on Acts ii. 42. says, "These three parts of worship were frequently, if not always, in those purer times, used together. Tho' some understand by breaking of bread, their civil fellowship and community; yet, breaking being a holy rite used by our Saviour at the institution of his supper, and breaking of bread being here put in conjunction with, preaching and praying, the celebration of the Eucharist, if not only meant, is chiefly to be understood in this place." The same sense he gives of the phrase breaking of bread, both here, and in other passages where connected with public worship, in his Synopsis Criticorum, or Abridgment of sacred Critics, a number of whom he quotes in support of it.

The English Annotations have it, in breaking of bread, "This is a term taken from what Christ did at his last supper; and used to signify the holy supper of the Lord". On ch. xx. 7. first day of the week, "That is the Lord's day; on this day Christians used to have their solemn assemblies, for public prayer, preaching, and administration of the Lord's supper." Says Diodati, "In breaking of bread, a phrase taken from that which the Lord did at his last supper, used to signify the celebration of the holy Supper." Acts xx. 7. To break, "namely to celebrate the sacrament of the holy supper. Now under this principal part, which terminates and ends all the rest, we must understand all those parts of worship that went before, namely, prayers, preaching of the word, praises, &c." On Acts xx. 7. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, he observes that the public services of the day were concluded with celebrating the Lord's supper. According to Dr. Gill, "They came together not to eat a common meal, but to break the Eucharist, (as the Syriac version renders it) by which the Lord's supper was called in the primitive times; or, as the Arabic version, to distribute the body of Christ, which is symbolically and emblematically held forth in the bread at the Lord's table."

Mr Henry, on the words of institution, writes; "It is hinted here, concerning this ordinance, that it should be frequent. Our bodily meals return often; we cannot maintain life and health without this; and it is fit that this spiritual diet should be taken often too. The ancient churches celebrated this ordinance every

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the contrary: but I refer not to such authorities as infallible, or to confirm what is not deducible from the word of God, and sufficiently attested by a cloud of unexceptionable witnesses. The agreement of the Expositors of Scripture on this point, seems plainly to arise from the native force of truth, producing conviction upon their minds; and, in this view, it merits attention, as the power of prejudice would naturally operate the contrary way. Besides, when men of learning and inquiry, notwithstanding difference of sentiment on other points, are unanimous on this, the harmony of their views furnishes no mean proof of the reality of the practice. I shall give you the observation of another, (Whitby, see page 22 of preceding Sermon,) and only remark, that where matters of fact are concerned, there is less danger of mistake. On 1 Cor xi. he observes, "*What is coming together ver. 17. coming to the church, ver. 18. coming to one place, ver. 19. is coming together to eat, ver. 33.*" *Wherefore my Brethren, when ye come together to eat, that is, the Lord's supper, tarry one for another.* "Accordingly," adds he, "it was the custom of the church, from the apostles times, thus to communicate upon the *Lord's day*;" that is, as the strain of his reasoning seems to require, upon every Lord's day, and as he more than once plainly asserts.

H. While you repeat these things, one thing strikes me, and it is this; if such a practice may be clearly established from Scrip-
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Lord's day "—In his much celebrated tract on the Supper, when exhorting Christians to a frequent participation, among other things worthy of notice, he hath the following remarks: "If a deliverance out of Egypt merited an annual commemoration, surely our redemption by Christ merits a more frequent one, especially since we need not go up to Jerusalem to do it. If this *Tree of life which bears more than twelve manner of fruits, yieldeth her fruit to us every month*, (the frequency, it would appear, observed in his own congregation) I know not why we should neglect it *any month*;" that is, to partake of it. "Where there is the truth of grace, this ordinance ought to be improved, which, by virtue of the Divine appointment, has a moral influence on our growth in grace. The great Master of the family would have none of his children missing at meal-time. While we are often sinning, we have need to be often receiving the seal of our pardon, because, tho' the sacrifice be perfect, and *able to perfect for ever them which are sanctified*, so that, that needs never be repeated; yet the application of it being imperfect, (as to the mode or measure of receiving) has need to be often made a fresh; the *worshippers, tho' once purged, having still conscience of sins* in this defective state."

After such testimonies, need I add the remark of Burkitt on the words of institution? "It is a Christian's duty, not barely to do this, but to do it often: frequent communicating is a great duty; the primitive Christians received *every Lord's day*; this is agreeable to the nature of the ordinance, which is a spiritual repast, banquet and feast; and therefore to be received frequently."

The Reader may find much to the same purpose in the writings of the late Mr. Willist, Dundee; and in the writings of the famous Charnock; as also in most of our practical authors, who have written upon the subject. Some may regard these Extracts for the sake of the men who wrote them, whose praise is in the churches who might not mind the same things from my pen, which is one reason of making them. Truth however will be truth by whomsoever writ or spoken.

ture and antiquity, how come the public teachers of Christianity to be so silent respecting it?

M. The charge may apply to some, but cannot to all; for hundreds of the best and most pious writers among us, have published such sentiments to the world, and the same is occasionally done from many pulpits; so that those who remain ignorant of it, are, in a great measure, inexcusable. Besides, permit me to add, that many are so blindly attached to custom, some of the most serious among us not excepted, that to declare such truths in their presence, would be like taking a dog by the ears; for on such points, where the goddess custom hath given her decision, they are wiser in their own conceit than seven men that can render a reason: for indeed there is no reasoning with them. There are few, if any congregations in which you will not find some of this description, who are capable of doing much mischief. Tho' such a disposition be unworthy of the professed disciples of Christ; yet there are who place much of their religion in this bigotted, fiery and intolerant zeal. Hence, the resolution to encounter such violent opposition, is no easy or common attainment; especially when the very attempt is enough to blast a minister's reputation with vast numbers of professing Christians, and to bring upon him the imputation of heresy, or of verging towards it. Tho' I do not mean wholly to justify those of our order, who neglect to inculcate what they know to be truth on this head, thro' fear of such consequences; yet let those who may be ready to condemn them, or who are apt to take offence at their plainly declaring their sentiments on such points, duly consider where the blame originates, and before they attempt to pull the mote out of their brother's eye, advert to the beam in their own.

H. I must own, from what you have suggested, that the ministers of religion have a strong temptation to pass such things over in silence, or with such soft and distant hints as are seldom understood, and more rarely produce the effect intended: for it is no easy matter for a man to divest himself of a concern for his reputation, his peace, and subsistence in life, tho' in defence of truth itself. But is there not a wo pronounced upon those who will not enter into the kingdom of heaven themselves, and, I may add, into the laws, observances and privileges of that kingdom, nor suffer those who are willing, to enter? For my part were I once convinced that such a practice is truly scriptural, and that such frequent observance of the ordinance would be for the glory of God, and the good of his church, Heaven forbid I should once oppose it!

M. Yes, there is such a wo, and you have reason to express yourself as you have done; for it is highly offensive to God, and dangerous to the individual, to throw obstacles in the way of any

in attempting to follow the Lord fully, and to promote what he hath sanctioned in his word, and approved in his people.

H. I have now heard much of the practice of the early Christians respecting the Supper; but allowing it to have been such as you, and the authors to whom you have referred, have represented it, might there not be something peculiar in their case—might not their gratitude, and the strength of their love to a lately crucified Redeemer, lead them to observe the ordinance much oftener than was necessary, or is binding on the Church in general, seeing neither our Lord, nor his apostles expressly enjoin any definite number of times; leaving this, it would appear, to the discretion of his Church and people, to be regulated by circumstances.

M. Indeed, the present practice seems to proceed on some such supposition, else we would be self-condemned in observing it. But tho' I cannot admit what you here assume, and many others have urged to the same effect; yet may we reason upon it a little. The love and gratitude of the first Christians, I grant, were great but not greater than they ought to be, or is binding on us, as professed Christians in every age. If we make the point of frequency on their part, the measure by which to estimate the degree of these amiable graces; then our love and gratitude, compared to theirs, must be languid and small indeed, ourselves being judges. If the matter was left, as you suppose, to their own discretion, they certainly did themselves great honor by continuing steadfast and abounding in the practice of a duty, in regard to which, according to those who take your side of the question, they were left quite at liberty, being under no ties as to frequency but those of love and gratitude to their lately dead, but now living and exalted Lord. But in proportion as they honoured themselves by such conduct, we, unquestionably, disgrace ourselves by the opposite, which announces either the want, or criminal defect of these dispositions to our very best Friend. Our conduct, as contrasted with theirs, faith, in effect, Because we are not bound to observe it a certain number of times, by an express injunction, we shall observe it as seldom as is at all consistent with its observance. Would not this be acting like a slothful and unfaithful servant who does as little to serve and please his master, as is consistent with the express letter of their agreement, and the securing his claim to the stipulated wages? a character not very amiable among men; and yet such slothful servants, by your mode of arguing, you would have us still continue to be, to the greatest and best of all masters, whose work is honourable, and reward munificent tho' I know you would with abhorrence reject the consequence. In all things let us be consistent.

H. Far be it from me to plead for any scheme that would weaken the ties of duty, or slacken the reins of diligence, did I see it that light.

M. I have charity for you to believe you would not; but we should take nothing in religion upon trust: for whatever is not of faith, not only as a principle in us, but also as the ground of our belief and practice, is sin, in one form or other. Is there not a curse pronounced on the man who performeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and offereth him a corrupt thing; while he hath a male in his flock? He requires we should serve him with our best, and be cordial and active in his service. In regard of this and every other service, let us say, with our Lord, "*We must work the works of him that sent us, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work.*" It should never be forgotten, that *the Lord loveth a cheerful giver*, who is steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in his work, in as much as he knows that his labour shall not be in vain; but is the present practice an exemplification of this?

H. I own the first Christians were more generous in their love and zeal; but do not we discover these also in a laudable degree, by attending on all the other services annexed to the ordinance, which take up so much of our time often when we can ill spare it? You know such a sacrifice is no easy matter, especially in hard times.

M. Tho' I grant this, yet can it not prove the strength of our love, or that our zeal is according to knowledge, unless we could shew that these were enjoined by the Lord himself, who prefers obedience to such sacrifices. And I venture to say, had he enjoined them upon us, we would think them not a little burdensome; but because they are a yoke of our own framing, we are tenacious of them. Can it be denied that seldom communicating proceeds from, and is a mark of lukewarmness? and these supernumerary services can never supply the place of zeal and love, or make up for the want of such an ordinance during so great a part of the year. Let the native dictates of genuine friendship determine.

H. You have not, in my opinion, fully answered what I lately urged. Do you admit that the measure or degree of frequency was left discretionary with the Church, to be regulated in every age and country as circumstances, and human prudence might direct? To me, and many others, this appears to be the case.

M. I will not take it upon me to say, that the observance of this ordinance is a necessary part of the sanctification of the Christian sabbath, tho' the first Christians evidently regarded it in that light, or that we cannot be accepted in observing it, unless we come up, in all respects to the example of the apostles and first Christians; yet I must commend those who study to copy an example so venerable, convinced their own necessities and obligations are as great, and their hopes and prospects of future happiness the same. I must also maintain, that a matter of such importance neither was, nor could be consistently left to the mere discretion of

of the Church, which even in her collective capacity is fallible, to be regulated as circumstances might in future direct; for God acts not so in any of his matters, as this would be suspending the observance of it, in a great measure, on the mutable will of man, which is not at all admissible. Nor can I think this such a matter of indifference as some suppose. 'Tho' some things which respect the external order of divine worship may be regulated by the collective wisdom and discretion of the Church, as may be found most decent, orderly and edifying, making the word in general, however, and the practice of scripture churches the rule of judgment on that head; yet a point of such importance to the honour of Jesus, and the advancement of true religion, as the frequent or seldom administration of such an ordinance, would not be left, there is reason to suppose, to the vague and undetermined arbitration of weak, erring man. This may be argued from the minuteness shewed respecting the appointment, and celebration of the passover; and from God's usual way of discovering his will to the sons of men, particularly in all his institutions; as also from the bad consequences that would naturally, if not unavoidably, follow from the exercise of such a discretionary power in the concerns of religion. The human heart is too apt to find excuses for neglecting duty, tho' not left so to itself.

H. But how do you think it appears, if I may be permitted to resume a point already more than once adverted to, that the first Christians observed no such days and services as we now have at the administration of the supper? I wish to hear if you have any farther reasons to induce you to believe they did not, before we pass on to something else.

M. If you ask any farther proof or reasons on this point, it may be justly inferred, in my opinion, that they did not, from the total silence of the sacred writings on the subject, and also from the very nature of the thing. That no such days or services are attached to it in scripture, every one in the least acquainted with the New Testament must grant. That they really could not be observed in that connexion, must also appear, if it is admitted, as indeed, all versant in church history must admit, that the ordinance itself was so frequently dispensed. To the poor the gospel hath been preached from its first promulgation, and will to the close of time; and therefore, its ordinances must be adapted to their circumstances in life. Christ's yoke he himself declares to be easy; but if it had been from the beginning, what modern times have made it in this instance, it would be a very intolerable one, unless his people had also then acted upon the modern plan.

H. Please let me hear in what respects; for his yoke, importing the services which he requires, must, like himself, be in every age the same.

M. In this we agree, and I was just proceeding to assign the reasons

reason upon which I found such a seeming paradox. If we grant that the apostles and first Christians partook of the supper every first day of the week, and this cannot be disproved; then to observe a public fast day, and the other modern services every time it was dispensed, would be more than was possible for them to overtake, and consequently what would not be required. God not only allows us in his holy law, which is of perpetual obligation, but also enjoins us, to work six days in the week, and to keep the seventh, and that alone holy to himself. May we not then infer, that a custom which invades this command, or interferes with its observance, so often as this ordinance is celebrated, cannot be from God, who is always consistent with himself? for it must either impose a yoke on his disciples which they cannot bear, or thrust the observance of the ordinance, contrary to primitive practice, into very detached portions of time; which last would naturally prove the case. The Pharisees of old fondly thought they would be heard in their prayers for their much speaking; and many seem to suppose that their acceptance, in partaking of the Lord's supper, must depend on their many appended services. Both the one and the other greatly err.

H. As I cannot deny that the Supper was frequently given in the first Christian churches, so I must admit that a merciful and gracious God would not lay upon his people a yoke of service, which, in the circumstances in which they are usually placed, would be more intolerable than even the burdensome yoke of the Mosaic ritual; because their situation in life will by no means permit them to devote so much time to the externals of religion; whence it is evident, that if these days had been observed from the beginning, it could not be often dispensed. I would wish to know if there be any account extant of the practice of the Church in this particular, in the ages after the apostles, and what that is. But I forget myself; for I did not intend to make so free with your time when I called, however desirous to hear the subject discussed to an end.

M. Make no apology; for I have told you before to command my service. However, as I have enlarged much beyond what I at first intended, I am content to proceed no farther at present; but will gladly embrace the first opportunity of giving you all the farther satisfaction in my power. You may therefore call upon me again, so soon as convenient; and in the mean time candidly weigh, in the balance of reason, and of the sanctuary, what hath been advanced during the course of our present conversation.

H. I am already greatly obliged to you for the pains you have been at, and shall be glad to be still more in your debt, by the continuance of your favours on some future occasion. May the Lord, the master you are called to serve, grant you mercy to be faithful in his service, assist you in all your ministerial labours, and make these

these subservient to his own glory, and the edification of many! I bid you Farewell at present.

M. I cordially thank you for your kind wishes, which I believe proceed from the heart. May you, and all that own me in the same capacity, be helped to profit by every mean of religious improvement, and may every good thing attend both you and them!

DIALOGUE III.

Hearer. I AM glad, Sir, to see you in health, and hope I have found you at leisure to turn your thoughts to the subject which could not be overtaken at our last meeting.

Minister. I thank God for the continuance of that inestimable blessing, which should be improved to his glory; and return your cordial thanks for the kind interest you take in my welfare. With pleasure I embrace this farther opportunity you give me, of resuming a subject in which we and all Christians have a deep concern; and promise myself your attention and candor, while I attempt to gratify your wishes.

H. You are justly entitled to these, and, I trust, your well-intended endeavours to aid my inquiries, and solve my doubts and difficulties, will not be in vain.

M. Such labours of love are very pleasant, when undertaken for those who discover a disposition to learn of him who is meek and lowly in heart, from the amiable, but rare graces of meekness and humility of mind. Where there is a disposition to listen to the voice of truth, and receive it in love, the task of instructing becomes easy in itself, and beneficial in its effects. But in our present free communication, I pretend not to the authority of a teacher, I only offer you my best aid as a friend, who cordially wishes your happiness in this, and in the world to come. As brethren, and fellow heirs of the grace of life, we owe each other all the offices of Christian friendship and love.

H. To that we are bound by the most sacred and indispensable ties; and how shall we approve ourselves Christians, indeed should we neglect these, and not be disposed to reply to him, who now addresses us from heaven, *Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men;—Speak Lord, thy servant heareth—Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*

M. Our Saviour spoke a certain truth when he said, *He that is of God, heareth God's words;* for hereby shall his true disciples be known from the false, who content themselves with saying, *Lord, Lord,* while they do not the things which he saith. Many can hear his words when these do not happen to strike against any fa-

yourite prejudice or passion; but to give him the hearing of faith in all things is peculiar to his obedient people. By such fruits you shall know them.

H. I wish to evidence that temper on the present occasion, that I may not offend God, and impede my own edification.

M. At our last interview, we took a short view of the scripture evidence which we have, of the frequent administration of the Supper, in the apostolic church or age; and, I trust, your attention hath not been directed to this in vain. I would now proceed to lay before you some account of the practice of the church in the ages which succeeded. But such testimonies are indeed so numerous, considering how few writers of the first ages are extant, and so explicit and well-attested, that no part of Christian antiquity admits of more full and incontestible evidence. This is the more remarkable, because the point of frequency seems not to have been called in question; nor the ordinance neglected, for several ages after the establishment of the Christian church in the days of the apostles: and hence, there was no need of making laws, or tendering exhortations to the church respecting it. For the first four or five centuries, Christians were forward to this duty of their own accord; unlike those of modern times, who care not how seldom they engage in this delightful service.

H. They had their reasons for their conduct, and we doubtless have also reasons for ours.

M. We no doubt have our reasons, such as they are; but the question is, Whether theirs or ours be best founded; or by what authority they acted in commemorating their Lord's death often, and we in taking the very opposite course, when the ordinance, its author, and the obligation to observe it, are the same. I had already occasion to refer to two periods which ascertain what the apostolic practice then was. From the express testimony of scripture, in the instances of Corinth and Troas, it appears that the Supper continued to be celebrated in the church 25 years at least after its institution, every Lord's day. The special revelation which he vouchsafed to Paul respecting it, is allowed to have taken place eleven years after his ascension; whence the terms importing frequency in the words of institution, as recorded by him, are and may be justly understood to have a particular reference to the practice which then prevailed, and to imply our Lord's approbation of it. When the disciples came together at Troas, on the first day of the week, to break bread, and Paul preached and dispensed the ordinance to them, 25 years had elapsed since the Lord gave in charge to his church to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of him. This they continued to do by his express approbation, or, what amounts to the same thing, by the express command or approbation of his apostles, every first day of the week, at the close of their religious services, as giving life, beauty and

significancy to all the other parts of their public worship. While we observe these statedly, and the other but occasionally, may it not be justly said, if on any occasion, *These ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone*: for what God hath joined, man should not, on any pretence, have put asunder.

H. I am not inclined to dispute, or call in question, the truth of the practice which is so generally said to have prevailed at that early period; for since I saw you last, I have read with care the tracts you put into my hand, which have almost gained my assent on that point, in connection with what you have adduced in the course of the argument. I also met a number of quotations in them from ancient authors, which go to establish the practice of after periods, of the authenticity of which I wish to learn your sentiments. I suppose Commentators make free to assert the frequency in the antient church upon the authority of such writings.

M. Partly on their authority, and partly on the authority of the sacred writers, so far as their account descends. We may rest fully satisfied, that the testimony of such ancient writers may be safely relied on, in a matter which fell under their own observation, and constituted part of their religious practice; for did we call in question the truth of that testimony, we might with equal propriety reject at once all the evidence of human records. These writings have been carefully preserved in the church, and that too throughout all the dark ages of Popery, the chief learning of the times being confined to the study of them. They have been always ascribed to the authors whose names they bear. The more early of them are often quoted by those who wrote at subsequent periods; and these quotations perfectly agree to what is found in such of the original authors themselves as are yet extant. None would presume to declare to the world that the churches observed a practice in their religious assemblies, which had no existence among them at the periods stated; and to such a conduct they could have no temptation, tho' they had been wicked enough to attempt it. Besides, how easily could their enemies, Jews and Heathens, who narrowly watched all their steps, detect the imposture? The perfect agreement then of so many writers, who lived at distant periods, and in places remote from each other, on a point of this nature, amounts to a moral demonstration of the certainty of such a practice. And this is farther confirmed, if possible, by the testimonies even of enemies to the Christian faith, who must have had access to know what they relate, and made it their business to inquire into the conduct of Christians, when met in their religious assemblies. Of this number was the proconsul Pliny, a man of inquiry and candor; the emperor Julian, who apostatised from the Christian faith; and the noted Celsus and Porphyry, who purposely wrote against it; yet in one way or other, were constrained, by the force of truth, to bear it honourable

honourable testimony. You have probably heard of such names, and the testimony of an enemy in such cases deserves credit. Admitting the force of such remarks, let me for a little advert to such authorities, which will speak for themselves.

H. I am fully satisfied that your remarks are well founded; and therefore proceed with you, without prejudice against the evidence of such authorities.

M. Such extracts as respect the point in hand, are to be found in many authors, some of which you may have seen, or can easily procure. The learned Dr. Cave in his *Primitive Christianity*, a book purposely written on the practice of the ancient church, furnishes many. The fullest however, that I have yet seen on the subject is, *Bingham on the Antiquities of the Christian Church*, who hath been at immense pains to collect from the original authors every necessary piece of information on the subject, which he hath digested under proper heads. To satisfy the learned, he gives the writers whom he quotes in their respective originals, with distinct and proper references. This author I have by me, and from him I have partly extracted what I am about to read. You may satisfy your curiosity when you please, by consulting him, or any other book on the subject in my possession, for yourself, a favour to which any of my people shall be welcome. I find another author referred to, as containing abundance of quotations from the early Christian writers on this point, *Chancellor King on the Church*; but I happen not to have him in my possession.

H. You are very kind, Sir, I shall be glad to consult them with convenience; but, in the mean time, please favour me with a recital of what you have taken the pains to write out.

M. From the address of Peter's first epistle, written about the sixth year of the Christian Aera, it appears, that many Christians had been then scattered throughout *Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*. By the time of *Trajan* these had continued so to spread, that according to other history, no place in the whole empire abounded more with Christians than these provinces. Accordingly, *Pliny, Proconsul of Bithynia*, having, by the express orders of his master, made strict inquiry into their public and private conduct, bears them honourable testimony in his letter to the emperor, written in the year 110, about 50 years after Peter wrote his first epistle, in which he informs him that they were used to meet on a *stated day*, before it was light, no doubt, by reason of the persecution which then prevailed, and to sing hymns to Christ as God, binding themselves by a solemn rite not to commit any wickedness. The stated day on which Christians met was the Lord's day, and the rite or sacrament by which they were wont then to bind themselves, was doubtless the ordinance of the Supper: for we cannot suppose that the Christians in these quar-

ters either altered or lost, in so short an interval, any more than other churches, the apostolic practice respecting the Supper. The testimony of Pliny, in a letter officially written to the emperor his master, merits the fullest credit, as a true account, not only of a particular church, but of all Christians, so far as he could learn it; while it serves to ascertain the point of frequency at that period. This epistle is said to have been writ only six years after the death of the evangelist John.

Ignatius, cotemporary to Pliny, in his epistle to the Ephesians still extant, exhorts them to be diligent in assembling frequently to celebrate the Eucharist, and glorify God. The frequency to which he urged may reasonably be supposed to be the existing practice of communicating *every Lord's day*. About 40 years afterwards, Anno 155, *Justin Martyr* in Samaria, in his second Apology for, or Defence of Christianity, written to the emperors, concludes a short account of the mode of conducting public worship in their religious assemblies on the first day of the week, with observing, that the Lord's supper was dispensed at the close of the public service†; in which account he perfectly agrees with Luke, Acts ii. 42. Says *Bingham*, after quoting *Justin M* "The like account is given by *Clemens of Alexandria*, when he says, that as soon as the bread was broken in the celebration of the Eucharist, they permitted every one of the people to partake. And we shall presently see more (adds he) of this custom of communicating every Lord's day in the writings of *Tertullian*, and *Cyprian*, and *Eusebius*, and many others, who speak of other days as well as the Lord's day, appropriated in some churches to this service: But about these the custom varied; For on other days some churches celebrated the Eucharist, and others did not; but on the Lord's day it was universally celebrated in all churches and never omitted by any assembly of Christians whatsoever. It is so much that some have observed out of *Chrysostom*, that Sunday was antiently, among other names, called *the Day of Bread*, because the Breaking of Bread was so general a custom in the church on that day."

All those authors who assert *week day* communions to have been in some churches, particularly on the Saturday or Jewish sabbath, vouch for the celebration of the ordinance every Lord's day; but I will not trouble you with their authorities. Perhaps the practice of communicating on week days arose from the consideration that our Lord instituted the ordinance on a week day; but they always took care to annex to it the other religious services which should attend its administration. *Tertullian* lived in Africa about

† The Reader will find the very words of Justin and of Pliny in the extract from Whitby, pag. 22. It is unnecessary to be more particular in referring to authors; because such passages are well known, and these who are anxious may find them in abundance in the books already mentioned in this Treatise.

the year 200, or in the close of the second century; and Cyprian, who lived in the same place, about 50 years afterwards, is equally explicit in his declarations about this matter. Victorinus in Hungary, about the year 290, after describing the practice of Christians on the Lord's day, adds, that it was usual to receive the Supper or sacrament. Basil, about the year 372; Ambrose, bishop of Milan, his cotemporary; and St. Hierom, about the year 390, agree that the same thing was observed in their time, in the churches with which they were connected and acquainted. Augustin, about the year 410, writes, that the eucharist, or Supper, was received by many on Saturday, as well as the Lord's day, *every week*, and by some even *daily*. When consulted with regard to the propriety of communicating so often, he said, "Daily to receive the Lord's supper I neither applaud nor censure, but I persuade and exhort to communicate *every Lord's day*." He reprobates the conduct of those in the Greek and Eastern churches who had so far declined from the primitive practice, as to partake only once a year; and observes that those who are not worthy to receive it *every Lord's day*, are not worthy to receive it once a year. It were easy to multiply authorities, and to extend extracts on the subject, if given at full length, into a pamphlet. I will not trouble you at present with references to canons that were made with a view to oblige Christians to communicate *every Lord's day*, upon pain of excommunication if they neglected this for several successive sabbaths; which shews the sense the church had of the obligation they were under to observe this practice.

H. You have given enough as a specimen of the primitive practice; I suppose those who have wrote on Church history admit the existence of such a practice in the first ages of Christianity.

M. They do without exception, and to call the truth of it in question, would be to discover their own ignorance, and incapacity for such a task. These two Church historians, Socrates and Sozomenes assert, that weekly communions were greatly kept up till the year 450, the time that they wrote or published their histories. The first of these writers specifies two exceptions; "Whereas, *says he*, all churches through the world, on the Sabbath day, in *every revolution of the week*, celebrate the mysteries, a term then used to denote the Lord's supper, they of Alexandria, and they of Rome, have refused to do it." The last probably set the example, tho' other churches began soon to follow the pattern. This shews to what the neglect of weekly communions owed its rise, the influence, example, and pretended traditions of the church of Rome; and those serve their cause who oppose a return to the primitive practice. The testimony of Mosheim, a man of probity, erudition, and extensive knowledge, will have weight with all the lovers of sacred literature. In his history of the first century, he observes, after specifying the other stated parts of public worship, "That the prayers of the first Christians were followed

followed by oblations of bread, wine and other things. Of the bread and wine presented in these offerings, such a quantity was separated from the rest, as was required in the *administration of the Lord's supper*; this was consecrated, or *set apart*, by certain prayers, and the holy supper was distributed by the deacons." When treating of the same subject, in his account of the second century, he has the following passage:—"During these sacred meetings, prayers were repeated, the holy scriptures were publicly read, short discourses upon the duties of Christianity were addressed to the people, hymns were sung, and a portion of the oblations, presented by the faithful, was employed in the celebration of the *Lord's supper*." His account of this matter in the third century runs thus: "Several alterations were now introduced, in the celebration of the Lord's supper, by those who had the direction of divine worship. The prayers used upon this occasion were lengthened; and the solemnity and pomp with which this important institution was celebrated, were considerably increased: no doubt, *adds he*, with a pious intention to render it still more respectable." Thus began a deviation from the original simplicity, which gradually degenerated into downright superstition. Yet the practice of weekly communions still continued, as we learn from his account of the fourth century, and other authorities. His words are, "It appears farther, by innumerable testimonies, that the Lord's supper was administered in some places *two or three times a week*, in others on the Sabbath only, to all those who were assembled together to worship God. In many places the bread and wine were held up to view before their distribution that they might be seen by the people, and contemplated with a certain religious respect; and hence, not long after, the adoration of the symbols was unquestionably derived." These passages sufficiently evince, that during the first four centuries the ordinance of the Supper was usually dispensed in all Christian churches, at least on every Lord's day. But after this, ah, what a falling off! which shews the fatal tendency of deviating from the scripture simplicity of Divine institutions, and how careful Christians should be to watch against this, or to return to it, if they have already unhappily fallen into that error.

H. Not to interrupt you, Sir, I think the conclusion is perfectly just; for what is said of strife applies here, *the beginning of it is as when one letteth out water*. These noxious plants are best checked in the bud; for such is defection from approved scripture examples, in cases where these can be clearly ascertained.

M. That is too true; for it is much easier to prevent than cure. Bishop Burnet on the 31st Article of the Church of England, intitled, *Of the one Oblation of Christ finished upon the cross* among other things which you may read at your leisure, speaking of the first Christians, hath the following observations: "Their worship concluded always with the Eucharist; such as were not capable

capable of it, as the Catechumens, and those who were doing public penance for their sins, assisted at the more general parts of the worship? When that was done, the faithful staid, and did partake of the Eucharist. Both from Justin Martyr and Tertullian, it is evident, that all the faithful did constantly communicate." In reviewing the evidence of the practice in question from the remains of Christian antiquity, I cannot better express myself than in the words of a justly respected living author, more than once already referred to: "The practice of those, *says he*, who lived in the very infancy of the church, must deserve peculiar regard. Their thorough acquaintance with the stile in which the New Testament was writ, the customs to which it alludes, and with many other peculiarities which are now almost buried in obscurity; but especially their conversing with the apostles, or their immediate disciples, must give them great advantages for understanding the religion of Jesus. And as many of them sealed their doctrine with their blood, we cannot reasonably entertain the least suspicion, that they would dare knowingly to alter the least circumstance in the last, the dying command of their dear master." Who does not see the force of these remarks?

H. I own they have some force; but as the primitive practice seems to be so well established, I should like to learn how the church came to decline so far from it, as to be content with observing the ordinance so very seldom. When and how came that practice to prevail?

M. It is very natural you should inquire, how an ordinance, which was every where dispensed at least every Lord's day, came afterwards to be so much neglected; and that very neglect to be regarded by many as a mark of reverence both toward it and its author; as if our Lord's command, *Do this in remembrance of me*, was as much honoured and complied with by forbearing his table as by frequenting it. The custom of seldom communicating commenced in the fifth century, and this neglect flowed not from any opinion that it should be so; but from guilty sloth, and a woful defection from the primitive zeal and love, which, alas! began then greatly to decline. That it could not arise from judgment, or a persuasion of its lawfulness and propriety, is evident from this, that wherever the gospel came, the frequent remembrance of Christ at his holy table came along with it as a part of his commandments, or law of love. Tho' the Roman catholics have grossly corrupted the Supper in various respects; yet some of their writers have the candor to own the primitive practice, and of course, their own wide defection from it. Of this number is the well known Dupin, who writing on the first centuries, says expressly, that the believers received the Eucharist very often, commonly as often as they met together for public worship. The very superstitions which began in the third, and came to a great height

height in the fifth and sixth centuries, still carried with them many proofs or traces of the primitive practice. When that practice came to be neglected, thro' the decay of real piety, admonitions were tendered to, and even censures were inflicted on those who were guilty of such a conduct; so that without professed penitence they were not received again into the communion of the church. The disease still increasing, from weekly communions they proceeded to monthly, and these also beginning to appear burdensome, the greater part received the ordinance only three times a year, and some not so often. The famous Chrysostom often inveighs in his writings against this growing evil. From Bingham's Antiquities, I have extracted part of an address from his third homily, which is very striking to that purpose. "I often, says he, observe a great multitude flock together to hear the sermon, but when the time of the holy mysteries, or the Lord's Supper, comes, I can see few or none of them: which makes me sigh from the bottom of my heart, that when I your fellow-servant am discoursing to you, you are ready to tread upon one another for earnestness to hear, and continue very attentive to the end; but when Christ our common Lord and Master is ready to appear in the holy mysteries, the church is in a manner empty and deserted. What pardon or excuse can be allowed for this? By this neglect you lose all the praise that is due to your diligence in hearing. If you had laid up in your hearts what I preach to you, it would retain you in the church, and prompt you to receive the holy mysteries with piety and veneration: But now, as if you were hearing one play upon an instrument, the preacher has no sooner done, but ye are all gone out of the church." "This, adds the author, I confess, proves that in Chrysostom's days there was a great abatement of the primitive zeal, and a great declension from the original practice: But still it is evident that frequent communions were in some measure kept up, by the Clergy and devouter sort of laity, who constantly frequented them, tho' many careless Christians had no other regard to them, but only to come formally once or twice a year, and that with superstition enough instead of religion, at some of the solemn festivals." This led the council of Agatha in Languedoc, An. 506, to decree, that none should be esteemed Catholic Christians who did not communicate at least three times a year, namely, at their three great festivals, Christmas, Easter, or Pentecost†, which they pretended

† Easter was deemed a solemn festival, and celebrated in the first month every year. A fierce and long contest arose about the time of observing it, which ended at length in excommunication. The churches of Asia minor kept it the same day that the Jews kept their Passover, on whatever day of the week that happened. The church of Rome, with other churches, kept it the Lord's day after. This diversity of custom, about a matter of mere superstition, created a violent dissent in the church, which issued in an open rupture. The church of Rome would

pretended to keep in memory of the passover; and Whitsunday, or Pentecost, which was observed in commemoration of the descent of the holy Spirit on the apostles. Hence those of the Roman catholic persuasion thought themselves very good Christians, if they partook thrice a year, and condemned a receiving oftener as presumption, and a being righteous over much†. But in a short time, it be-

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came

impose their usages on the churches of Asia minor; and these peremptorily refused to submit. After a mutual agreement that every church should be left to follow its own custom, Pope Victor revived this controversy, and excommunicated the Asiatics for refusing to comply with the Romish church in this matter, condemning them as heretics, and loading them with odious epithets. In the year 325, the council of Nice decreed, That throughout the whole Christian world, Easter should be observed not on the day on which the Jewish passover fell, but on the Lord's day ensuing, which came to be the general practice. Like this, many of the controversies that have arisen in the church, and excited mutual jealousies and animosities, have respected matters of human tradition or opinion; for by these in every age hath the law of God been made of none effect, spiritual tyranny promoted, and the exercise of Christian charity and forbearance banished in a great measure from among men. These are some of the baneful effects of obeying and following men rather than God, either in the articles of our faith, or in the acts of our worship. To the law and to the testimony. Whatever is not founded there, is to be rejected as spurious.

† Here I may give place to a few things which could not so conveniently be inserted in the Dialogue. The eloquent Chrysostom quoted above, complains in his homilies, "In vain stand we at the altar, none care to receive." And after representing the danger of unworthy receiving, he proceeds, "I speak not this to deter you from coming, but from coming carelessly; for as there is danger in coming carelessly, so there is famine and death in the not partaking at all. This table is, as it were, the sinews of our soul, the girding up of the mind, the support of our confidence, our hope, our health, our light, our life."

Dr. Waterland on the Eucharist, chap. 14. observes, that during the first three centuries, we meet with no canons made to enforce frequent communion; scarce so much as exhortations to it; or any complaints of neglect in that article, which is an argument, that Christians in those times were not tardy in that respect, but rather forward and pressing, under a high notion of the privilege and comfort of partaking of the holy communion. Tertullian, who lived in the close of the second century, observes, that there were some who scrupled to communicate Wednesdays and Fridays. But even that shews, they had no scruple at communicating every Lord's day. The above I take as I find it in Dr E—'s tract, as I happen not to have the books by me. I have enriched this tract with several extracts from him; of which let this suffice as an acknowledgment.

About the year 324, it was decreed, say the same venerable Author, at a council held at Elibiris in Spain, that no offerings should be received from such as did not receive the Lord's supper: which shews, that some who called themselves Christians, were beginning to neglect the dying command of their professed Lord.—The first council of Toledo, in the year 400, enacted, that those who were observed never to come to the communion, should be admonished; and if they did not reform, obliged to submit to penance: and that such of the clergy as came not to daily prayers and communion should be deposed, if they did not reform after admonition. From this decree it is plain, adds he, that tho' the sacrament was daily dispensed to such as were willing to receive, yet, that the neglect of that ordinance had begun to infect the clergy as well as the people. Yet hitherto this was a fault, with which only particular persons were chargeable, and warmly testified against, not only by the most eminent fathers, but by the public canons of the church. Bingham, to whose works I have

came the general practice to communicate only once a year, at Easter or Pasch; and the famous council of Trent accounted this sufficient. In the Greek church indeed, which was removed at a greater distance from the source of corruption, we are told, it was usual to receive the Supper weekly, even so low as the *seventh* century; and that such as neglected for *three weeks* together were excommunicated. Thus Popery crowned what defection from the truth, and the want of love and zeal began; and the Protestant churches are content to tread in the steps of *the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth*; and indeed contend for it as for the faith and practice once delivered to the saints. Ah how are we fallen, and in love with our corruption! Thus many glory in their shame, and hold fast one of the greatest corruptions of Popery, refusing to let it go; and yet they would be thought

might have sometimes occasion to refer, takes notice of the very same things, and also of the decrees of some other councils.

Speaking of the decision of the council of Trent, respecting annual communion he says, "It was then the church of Rome which introduced seldom communicating; for which, as for all their *Innovations*, they pretended an *antient Tradition*; and by which they alledged men's reverence for that ordinance would be heightened. And indeed so it was, till Veneration gradually increasing, at length produced *Adoration*, and the blasphemous absurdity of a *wafer God*. A striking instance how dangerous it is for Christians to pretend to secure reverence to the institution of their Lord, by methods different from those which he himself hath appointed; and that it is our only safety to adhere to the plan delivered us in the writings and practice of those who were under the infallible guidance of the Spirit, without turning aside to the right-hand or to the left. If we do otherwise, how prudent soever our measures may seem, and however pious our intentions may really be, we have in so far rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom can there be in us?"

I make free to subjoin a note from Mr. Randal's tract on this subject, as serving to shew the force and justice of the above sentiments. "Tho' forms must preserve religion among men, yet certainly God is the only judge what kind and number of these is best proportioned to his several dispensations, and needful to the man under them.—Thus he gave, for wise reasons, many more forms to the dispensation of shadows under Moses, than he hath thought proper when the veil is taken away, and men now see face to face.—And doth not the spirit, that leads to all the appointments about the Lord's supper, and would plant other guards, or contrive other assistances for its solemnity than God hath appointed, at the same time in some measure disannul his judgment,—and open an endless door to all the pomp, ceremony, will-worship, garbs, or music; whose devisers, in their wisdom, insist on their usefulness, to heighten the solemnity of every part of the service. God, as those who plead for these things say they are useful for that end in the Lord's supper? I have read nothing juster on this matter than what a great man of reason, and at the same time a high church man, hath said, which is so applicable to all such subjects, I mean, Dr. Taylor, in his *Duct. Dubit.* who, speaking of the sacrament, says, "For in these rites which are ministeries of grace, no man must interpose any thing that can alter any part of the institution, or make change or variety in that which is of divine appointment; for the effect in these things depends wholly on the will of God, and we have nothing to discourse or argue, we know nothing but the institution, nothing of the reason of the thing; and therefore we must in these cases, with simplicity and obedience, apply ourselves to practice as we have received; for we have nothing else to guide us; memory and obedience, not discourse and argument, are here in season." "How applicable and strong this is to the present case, I need not represent."

mighty good Protestants, and zealous advocates against the church of Rome. So difficult is it to reclaim men from any practice, when they are once joined to it as an idol, or practise it merely because custom hath prescribed it, and they think it decent and becoming. Christ's sheep, however, hear his voice, and will not be conformed to the world.

H. But were there not visible causes that operated to produce such a remarkable declension, or falling off from the practice of the primitive church?

M. There were; for *can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water?* Such melancholy effects always suppose the existence of a corresponding cause; for in this respect, the appearances of the natural world are not more uniform in their procedure than those of the moral.

H. You will oblige me by pointing out some things, which, in your opinion, tended to produce such a palpable change.

M. You know that the first Christians were exposed to much persecution, and this prevented the men of the world from associating with them; for to this they had no adequate temptation, which served to keep the communion of the faithful pure. But when the churches came to enjoy rest, and especially when Constantine ascended the imperial throne, which was about the beginning of the *fourth century*, the affairs of the church took a quite different turn. I find two quotations made to my hand, which place this point in the clearest light; the one from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and the other from Mosheim's *Church history*. The former, when treating of the reign of Constantine, expresses himself thus: "The exact balance of the two religions, viz. *the Christian and the Pagan*, continued but for a moment; and the piercing eye of ambition and avarice soon discovered, that the profession of Christianity might contribute to the interest of the present, as well as of a future life. The hopes of wealth and honours, the example of an emperor, his exhortations, his irresistible smiles, diffused conviction among the venal and obsequious crowds which usually fill the apartments of the palace. And as the lower rank of society are governed by imitation, the conversion of those who possessed any eminence of birth, of power, or of riches, was soon followed by dependent multitudes." Such are the remarks of the learned author of that celebrated performance, and Mosheim adds to the same purpose: "This zealous prince employed all the resources of his genius, all the authority of his laws, and all the engaging charms of his munificence and liberality, to propagate Christianity in every corner of the Roman empire." To suppose that men brought to profess Christianity from such inducements, would be zealous and frequent in remembering an unseen Saviour at his table, would be to expect to gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles.

Thus the distinction betwixt the church and the world, the kingdom of God, and the secular kingdom, was destroyed; and what contributed at first to the corruption of Christianity, contributes still to prevent a return to the good old way. The increasing wealth, preferments and ambition of the Clergy; the removal of the seat of empire from Rome to Byzantium, which, after the emperor, was called Constantinople, whence the Bishop of Rome and his suffragans got a fair opportunity of usurping supremacy in the church; and especially, the rapid growth of ignorance, superstition and barbarous manners, in consequence of the irruption of the Northern nations, who in a short time over-ran and subdued the Western part of the Roman empire; these causes contributed to the rapid progress of the papal system, and, along with that, to the corruption of the ordinance of the Supper. These barbarians, finding Christianity, in its present corrupted and mutilated state, so agreeable in many things to their own former superstitions, and, in the hands of corrupt church-men, so pliant and accommodating, they were soon brought to profess it, but indeed gained very little by the change. They changed the articles of their creed in some points, and the names of the objects of their worship; but they made little progress in the knowledge of divine truth, and scarce altered their worship or their manners to the better. In this mournful state did what is called Christendom continue for ages, till, at the reformation in the sixteenth century, the light of truth, so long smothered and resisted, broke forth from the dismal gloom.

But tho' the Lord's supper continued to be celebrated and received by the more pious and devout Christians, who lamented the growing apostacy, in almost, if not all churches, on every first day of the week, until about the commencement of the fifth century; yet during the fourth, by reason of the causes already assigned, defection from the primitive purity of the church began more and more to appear. When persecution ceased to rage, and the earth smiled upon the woman, yea, began to load her with honours and gifts, many hypocrites, or mere formal professors, who never felt the power of truth on their hearts, took her by the hand, acquired an ascendancy in all her concerns; and thus what was at first but a little leaven, came in a century or two, to leaven the whole lump. Such nominal Christians could have no just sense of the proper use, and great advantage of the holy Supper, or of the obligations to observe it duly. Having merely a name to live, while they were really dead in trespasses and sins, and only a form of godliness without the least experience of its power; is it any way surprising that the frequent return of religious exercises; particularly of an ordinance so spiritual and heavenly, should be uneasy and disagreeable to such characters? Their example however, would soon be followed by lukewarm Christians,

Christians, who had *fallen from their first love*; who, alas! abound in other churches, besides that of Laodicea. I fear, I would not be guilty of any breach of charity by saying, that opposition to attempts to restore the primitive practice, when that practice is made known, originates more or less from similar causes; under whatever specious pretexts that opposition may be veiled. Love to Jesus will lead to prize and observe the means by which he makes himself known.

H. I think you have sufficiently accounted for the gross corruption of primitive Christianity, particularly in the instance of the Supper; for the causes specified would naturally produce the assigned effects. Were it not that your compliance with my wishes hath already put you to so much trouble, I would be glad to learn what the sentiments of the Reformers from Popery were on this point, and if they made any efforts to restore the primitive practice.

M. I had that in my eye, and shall willingly gratify your wish on that head, at a future occasion, if the Lord will. But I intended to conclude what I mean to say at this interview, with a pretty long extract from a valuable author already quoted; yet fear I have encroached too far on your patience, to detain you any longer at the time.

H. Fear not that; for however much I like to hear your own remarks, those of reputed authors of some standing in the church, acquire weight and respectability from that very circumstance. You will therefore oblige me, by reciting your extract without ceremony.

M. It shall be at your service, but you will excuse the repeating of some things already adverted to, rather than break the coherence; for it may serve as a short recapitulation of our present discourse. The author is speaking of frequent Communion, and the times of celebrating it in the antient church, and proceeds thus: "It has been shewed before, in speaking against private and solitary masses, that tho' it be now the custom in the church of Rome for the priest to receive the Eucharist without any other communicants, either clergy or laity, how many soever be present at the action, yet there was no such custom ever heard of in the antient church. And tho' in most other churches this corruption be reformed, yet there remains a great defect still uncorrected, which is the want or neglect of frequent communion. I shall make no farther enquiry into the causes of this neglect, whether it proceed from a general decay of Christian piety, or from a want of strict discipline in the church, but only observe that it is a great declension from the zeal and fervour of the primitive ages. For then it is certain, it was both the rule and practice for all in general both clergy and laity to receive the communion every Lord's day, except such as were unqualified for it
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either as catechumens or penitents, who of course for want of a due preparation were obliged to abstain from it. Among the apostolical canons there are two to this purpose. The first says, "If any Bishop, Presbyter or Deacon, or any other of the Clergy, does not communicate, when the oblation is offered, let him shew cause why he does not, that if it be a reasonable cause, he may be excused; but if he shew no cause, let him be excommunicated; as giving scandal to the people, and raising suspicion against him that offers." And the next canon says, "If any of the faithful come to church to hear the scriptures read, and stay not to join in the prayers and receive the communion, let them be excommunicated, as the authors of disorder in the church." The council of Antioch, which was held in the middle of the fourth century, repeats this decree: "Let all those be cast out of the church, who come to hear the scriptures read, in the church, but do not communicate with the people in prayer, or disorderly turn away from the participation of the Eucharist, till by confession and fruits of repentance and intercession they have obtained pardon." "These canons shew, that as often as they met together for divine service on the Lord's day, they were obliged to receive the Eucharist under pain of excommunication. And all other canons which speak of the order of divine service, plainly shew that the celebration of the Eucharist was always one inseparable part of it. The council of Laodicea, as has been often noted before, describes the whole in this order. And all such canons as forbid the penitents to partake, do plainly suppose all the rest of the people to be partakers of it."

Passing over a great many things of a similar nature, with a number of authorities, some of which have been already adduced, speaking of the sad decline which took place, and of the superstition which led them to partake of the Supper only at some of their solemn festivals, he adds; "When matters were come to this degeneracy, some councils instead of reviving the antient discipline, and quickening men by just censures to frequent communion, contented themselves to oblige the laity to receive three times a year, at the three great festivals, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost or Whitsuntide, under the penalty of not being counted catholic or good Christians, if they neglected. So things continued to the time of Charles the Great, when the third council of Tours made a decree to the like purpose, An. 813. That all laymen, who were not under the impediment of greater sins, should receive three times a year at least, if not more frequently. And yet the clergy continued to communicate frequently with some of the devouter laity every Lord's day, as appears from the writers of that age. And it is remarkable, that even in this age the council of *Aix la Chapelle* made some attempt to restore the
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antient practice to its primitive lustre, by reviving the decree of the council of Antioch.

But the disease was grown too epidemical and inveterate to be easily corrected; and therefore in a degenerate age the corruption went on and increased, and the council of Lateran under Innocent III^d. added strength and confirmation to it. For whereas before all men were obliged to communicate at least three times a year, this council made it necessary to do it no more than once, at Easter, when every man and woman that was come to years of discretion, was bound to make auricular confession of all his sins to his own priest, and receive the communion. Here we may date the utter ruin of the antient and apostolical practice of frequent and general communions. For from this time people began to think themselves discharged of the duty of frequent communicating, and contented themselves with receiving once a year at Easter, leaving their priests to communicate alone; which quickly was attended with another corruption of private and solitary Masses, which usurped the room of the antient general communions of the whole church one with another, and made the antient prayers a mass of absurdities, whilst they prayed and gave thanks to God for the whole congregation as communicants, when there was not so much as one communicant properly speaking among them, but all mere spectators of the priest pretending to act in the name of the whole church, and communicate in pageantry without any real communion. This was the general state of the Romish service at the time of the Reformation, except in some few collegiate churches, where, if Bona, one of their own writers, say true, the clergy continued to communicate with the officiating priest, according to antient custom, without which, he confesses, it is hard to make intelligible sense of many of their prayers that are daily used in their service." Bingham on the antient Church, vol. I. Book xv. This is the extract intended, and you see it gives a short view of the corruptions of the Supper, and of religion in general in the Romish church. Also we may see from it whose example they copy, who content themselves with annual communion, or tho' they should repeat it even twice or thrice a year. Are not we then fallen from the first love, and do not we thence need to repent, to remember whence we are fallen, and do the first works?

H. I thank you for the information I have received, and think, before you have done, I shall be favoured with a short history of our Lord's supper from the commencement of the Christian church. That we have fallen from the practice you have described, whether right or wrong, cannot be denied. I bid you, Adieu, and will embrace the first opportunity of waiting again upon you; making it meantime my business coolly to weigh what you have advanced.

DIALOGUE

DIALOGUE IV.

Hearer. I Am glad, Sir, to find you at home and alone; and hope it may be convenient for you to resume the subject of discourse at our late interviews. For this purpose I make free to call upon you, as desired at parting.

Minister. You cannot be more desirous to receive any information I can give on the subject, than I am to communicate it to one of your candid dispositions.

H. I thank you for the honour you do me, and only wish I may deserve it, tho' I could pretend to no merit on that head if I did; for every real Christian, like his Master, will be meek and lowly in heart, and ever disposed to hear with attention, and judge with candor, whatever offers itself to his consideration, under the sanction of truth or duty.

M. While I commend what I think praise-worthy, I do not mean to say, that we are not bound to cherish and exercise this upon every proper occasion.

H. Before you proceed to the object in view, I beg leave to advert to a circumstance, which I suppose is new in this place. It gave me great pleasure to see, the other night, so many ministers and Christians, of different denominations, cordially joining together in prayer for the enlargement of Messiah's kingdom in the earth, in the conversion of those who yet sit in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death; and hope the spirit that manifests itself in different places on such occasions, may be a token for good to our native land†.

M. Associations for such noble and benevolent purposes must yield refined pleasure to every pious and enlightened Christian, who views them in a proper light; and I trust they may be productive in future of the happiest consequences both at home and abroad. The success of an attempt to dispel the shades of ignorance, which have so long involved the benighted nations in their fatal

† A public meeting held in the Associate church in this place, which repeatedly met for the purpose of prayer for the success of the Missionary scheme, entered into of late in these lands, is alluded to. After several efforts to engage Brethren of other denominations to associate with them for the same laudable purpose, they formed themselves into a society, chose a Committee of their number, and solicited one of the ministers present to preach at the opening of their next meeting. As they have not yet determined to whom they shall connect themselves, that being deferred till they should next meet, nothing can be said decisively respecting it; tho' from the private sentiments of individuals, it is probable, they may be induced to attach themselves to the London Missionary Society, from whom the benevolent plan hath of late originated, and who seem to conduct it with a true catholic spirit. Who can tell but the time to favour the Heathen may be now at hand? Let Christians use the means which Providence hath put in their power, leaving consequences to Heaven.

fatal gloom, with the cheering beams of divine truth, must engage the warmest wishes of the friends of Jesus and of humankind. It is indeed such a noble effort of disinterested benevolence as fills the mind with the magnitude of the design, and animates the soul by the vast importance of the object. God hath given his Son *the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession*; and will go on conquering and to conquer till they are brought to bow to his sceptre, when *men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed, and the whole earth be filled with his glory*. Mountains to human power insurmountable oppose the accomplishment of such predictions; but what are they? *before Zerubbabel they shall become a plain*. It shall come to pass in the last days, that *the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it*. These things may animate our hope, and give vigor to our prayers and exertions.

H. They doubtless may, and a variety of circumstances lead to hope, that God is about to accomplish some great work in the earth. If I mistake not, the prejudices which have so long unhappily divided different denominations of Christians among us, are rapidly giving way, at least with those who have been often branded with bigotry and intolerance; whatever may be the case with others make loud pretensions to candor, moderation, and liberality of sentiment.

M. Did love to the Redeemer prevail more universally at home, this would give greater union, vigor and exertion to our endeavours to spread the gospel abroad. And was that principle more generally possessed and felt, an attempt to promote a more frequent remembrance of him at his holy table would meet the cordial concurrence of Christians of all denominations. But how can this be the case, while one essential mean of promoting that love, and inspiring such zeal, is neglected, or seldom observed? We may differ in our views upon other points, and such difference, instead of begetting alienation of affection, and giving occasion to severe animadversion on each other's principles and conduct, should give scope to the exercise of charity and mutual forbearance; but in this all Christians are certainly agreed, that we are under unspeakable obligations to the Son of God, who hath loved us, and given himself to the death for us, that he might wash us from our sins in his own blood. While then we contend earnestly for what we deem essential to his glory, let us be chiefly emulous of loving him supremely, and of giving the most incontestable proofs of our love by a corresponding practice.

H. Certainly this would be acting in character; for why should things divide the professed disciples of Jesus, and exhaust their zeal, which constitute no part of real Christianity, no scripture term of the communion of saints, and were unknown in the church of

God till the unhappy divisions of modern times gave them birth? In my opinion, it is no lax, or culpable principle in religion, to be companions, like David, of them that fear God and keep his precepts, and to unite their best efforts in promoting his cause and interest in the world.

M. Doubtless difference of opinion upon some points should be no bar to this; nor to their cordial efforts to revive, under God, something like primitive Christianity, particularly in that essential branch of it,—the frequent pious and affectionate remembrance of their common Lord at his holy table. Among the various grounds of testifying against the corruptions which have been grafted on genuine Christianity, sure the defection from the scripture pattern of the Supper is none of the least. And is it not surprising, that this should be totally overlooked in bearing open testimony against the errors and defections of the times, and not only overlooked, but meanwhile exemplified? But waving such remarks, let us proceed to trace the opinion of the Reformers respecting the frequency proper to be observed in dispensing the Supper, and what attempts they have made to restore the primitive practice; for you expressed your wish to learn their views and conduct in this particular.

H. Tho' the weight of the argument in favour of such a practice must rest on something else, yet may it be of service to know the sentiments of men so eminent for talents, piety and influence, and whose memory is still so highly respected in the Christian world, upon a point of such general concern. You will therefore oblige me by giving a short view of the matter.

M. I cannot say that I am master of so much information on that subject as might be wished, tho' I may have access to know what may suffice. I have formerly laid before you a brief view of the deviation from the apostolic and primitive example, in regard of the Supper, which began early, and kept pace with other defections, till they issued in the gross superstitions of Popery. After these had prevailed for so many ages; and taken such deep root in the hearts of men, that they acquired the prescription of custom and general opinion, the difficulty of returning to the primitive practice, so long disused, may be easily conceived. Hence the most active instruments in the reformation fell far short in practice of what they maintained in theory; yet, lamented this as a great defect, which all their influence could not remedy.

H. What were Calvin's sentiments on this point, who is allowed to have had as just views of the nature and ends of the Supper as any of the reformers?

M. He certainly had; for he held the middle path betwixt the monstrous extreme of the Romish transubstantiation, and the Lutheran error of consubstantiation, or the actual presence of Christ's body in the ordinance, in and with the external symbols

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of bread and wine. In his Institutions, when treating of the ordinance of the Supper, he declares his sentiments plainly. Let a passage or two suffice. Speaking of the corruptions of the Romish church, which had also invaded this ordinance, and of the way it should be dispensed, he adds, "Now bidding farewell to so great a heap of ceremonies, it might thus have been most comely ministered, if it were oft, and *at least every week* set before the church." He urges Acts ii. 42. to prove that in the days of the apostles the supper made an usual part of the public worship of the church. He reprobates annual communion as an invention of the devil, to cool the flame of Christian love, and experience shews how much it is calculated to produce that effect. "*Every week at least*, (says he) the Lord's table should be set before the assembly of the Christians†." Such were his sentiments, but we do not find that he could attain to a greater frequency in his own congregation than once a month; which he pathetically lamented. He seems to have thought, with many others, that the participation of the Supper should ever make a part of the sanctification of the first day of the week. And indeed some have thought that the constant remembrance of Christ in the or-

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† When speaking of the Supper in his Institutions, among other things, he hath the following remarks. "What I have already discoursed concerning this ordinance, abundantly shews, that it was not for this end appointed, that once yearly, and that in a careless manner it should be received by Christians, but that it should be frequently used by them all, that they may often call to mind the sufferings of Christ; and by that remembrance, strengthen their faith, and animate themselves to sing the praises of God, and celebrate his goodness; and, in fine, thereby cultivate mutual love, and thus express it to one another, the bond of which they have beheld in the union of the body of Christ."

He proceeds to shew from the Scriptures, "That according to apostolic practice, the Church never assembled together without Doctrine, Prayers, the Supper and Alms." He produces several authorities to prove, that this continued to be the practice for many ages. Quoting the canons that were made in different councils to enforce it, he adds, "By these rules good men would retain the practice of frequent communion, delivered down from the apostles themselves, which, tho' extremely profitable, they observed, by degrees growing out of use." Animadverting on the modern custom of seldom communicating, he uses the following strong language: "Truly this custom of appointing men to communicate once yearly, is, without all doubt, a contrivance of the Devil, whoever was the instrument of introducing it; that Popish custom is an execrable invention."

From the form of dispensing the ordinances, drawn up by Calvin for the use of the church of Geneva, no doubt with the approbation of his Colleagues in the ministry, it appears, that intimation was made to the people the preceding Lord's day, to prepare for it; and that strangers, who inclined to partake, might converse with the minister. On the day of dispensing, the minister explained the design of the Supper, and how it ought to be received, either at the end of the sermon, or, if he thought proper, spent his whole sermon on that subject. Tho' that form does not mention how often in the year that ordinance was dispensed; yet from Calvin's known zeal in pleading even for weekly communion, it may be supposed it was at least once a month; and especially as he approved the Book of common Order of the English church at Geneva, where Mr. Knox was minister, which takes notice that the Lord's supper was commonly administered with them once a month, or so oft as the congregation thought expedient.

dinance upon that day, or of his death, might be the chief reason why it was termed *the Lord's day*.

H. But had not his judgment of the matter influence with other churches, seeing his name and sentiments have been held in such veneration among the reformed?

M. So far it had; for some of those churches that were framed after the model of that of Geneva, administered the ordinance once a month, which hath been generally the practice of the Dissenters from the church of *England*. Others again celebrate it eight or six times a year, as the Dutch presbyterians. The reformed church of France, as appears by their public acts, enjoined four times a year; tho' they professed, at the same time, an intention to forward a more frequent administration, which they judged to be proper and desirable. This seems to have been the least number of times, that any Protestant church allowed, by their public acts, the Supper to be dispensed, at least in towns, concerning which they thought proper to make a distinction. I find the following passage quoted from the Discipline of the church of France; "Altho' it hath not been the custom to administer the Lord's Supper in the greatest part of our churches more than four times a year; yet it were to be desired, that it might be oftener, because it is most profitable for the children of God to be exercised, and grow in faith, by the frequent use thereof, and the *example of the primitive church doth invite us to it*; and therefore our national Synods shall take that care and order in this matter, as is requisite for the weal and happiness of our churches." Here the Protestant church of France gave their opinion of the duty of frequent communicating, by expressing their approbation of the example of the primitive church. The learned *Beza*, and *Rivet*, Calvin's own Colleague, with many other eminent men, presided in, or were connected with the Synods that drew up the work from which the above extract is taken.

H. What were the sentiments of other reformers on the point, did they agree with those to whom you have just now referred?

M. Tho' their practice in this important matter might not in all respects agree, and came far short of the primitive practice; yet their sentiments were much the same, and testified their approbation of that practice. In Switzerland, the reformation made an early and rapid progress, under the influence of that famous worthy Zuinglius, who defended it with his pen, and with his life. The following extracts from the Confession of the Helvetic churches shew the order of their worship, and their sentiments on this head. "They judge that rite, manner, and form of the Lord's supper to be most excellent, which comes nearest the institution of our Lord, and the doctrine of the apostles about it.—Of this holy food therefore we make *frequent use*, because, by means of this memorial, beholding with the eyes of faith,

faith, the death and blood of him that was crucified, and meditating upon our redemption, with a sensible relish of the celestial, and real foretaste of eternal life, we are refreshed with delight ineffable by this spiritual, enlivening repast of our inner man, and made to rejoice with joy unspeakable, for the life and immortality brought to light by the gospel, and indeed are altogether, with our souls, and all that is within us, poured forth, and lost in praise and blessing for the so astonishing gift of Christ toward us.—After this manner we judge the work of holy assemblies should be carried on; that first of all the word of God should be daily published to the people, in a public place set apart for holy things;—that the obscurer things in scripture should, by well qualified persons, be opened and explained, that then the *holy Eucharist* should be celebrated to put the faith of believers on exercise, that fervent and constant prayer should be made for the wants and necessities of all. Other perplexing, useless, and endless ceremonies we banish from our religious assemblies.” How agreeable to scripture this whole account?

H. I own it is simple, and seems to correspond to what you have described as the practice of the church in the first ages. Had not Martin Luther an active and eminent hand in the reformation from popery? did he and his followers adopt the same plan?

M. Luther, and those who go under his name, are but half-reformed in regard to the Supper, and therefore are not such competent judges in the case. Tho’ they have abolished the Popish mass, and restored to the church her communion in the Supper; yet they still unhappily retain the great holidays of the Papal church, upon which they administer the ordinance, not confining it however to these, for they dispense it oftener. Their own account of the matter in their Confession runs; “There is appointed one common mass, (a term understood in a very different sense from the use of it in the church of Rome) according to the institution of Christ, wherein the pastors of the church consecrate, take, and give to others the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, and that is practised every holiday, and on other days, if any incline to use it. None are admitted to the communion before they are tried.” This plainly implies much greater frequency than takes place among us. Dr. E. tells us, in his tract on frequent communion, on the authority of some writers to whom he refers, That the Lutherans have a communion every Sunday and holiday throughout the year. And tho’ the number of communicants is often but small, that yet it is usual among them to communicate three or four times a year, *at least*. In none of these churches did they dream of annexing certain days as in the least requisite to the due administration of the ordinance; this device being reserved to the wisdom of our Countrymen, to whom the practice of it is almost, if not altogether now confined.

fined. In the account of the order and discipline of the Protestant church in Bohemia, we are told that the ordinance of the Supper is usually dispensed among them four times a year. That they administer it oftener when the need of Christians requires it, or they express their desire for it; but thus often they enjoin it to be dispensed for the sake of uniformity, to which duty itself hath been often sacrificed. With regard to that diversity of practice in this instance, which takes place at home and abroad, let it not surprise us; for it is a native consequence of forsaking or overlooking the only unerring rule that could preserve scriptural uniformity, the only uniformity worth contending for. As truth and duty are one and uniform, so the deviations from them are many and discordant.

H. How far hath the church of England restored the ancient practice? for tho' we differ from her in many things, yet she may retain and observe others which merit imitation.

M. That church enjoins, "That in every parish and chapel, where sacraments are to be administered within this realm, the holy communion shall be ministered by the parson, vicar, or minister, so often, and at such times, as every parishioner may communicate at least thrice in the year." It is to be observed, however, that such acts or regulations were never intended in any churches to bind up their members from such frequency as might be judged expedient by individual congregations. We accordingly learn, that many in that church have practised a much greater frequency, without any obstruction on the score of uniformity. This Bingham asserts, who himself was a member of that church, and had full access to know the certainty of the practice. His words are, "Tho' the rules of the church of England require the people in general to receive but three times a year, as of necessary Ecclesiastical obligation; yet in our Cathedral churches the *Eucharist* is ordinarily celebrated *every Lord's day*; as it is also in some of the *London* parish-churches; and others both in city and country have monthly communions. Yet there remains (adds he) a great deal still to be done, to bring this matter to the primitive standard."

H. I am glad to find that church authority does not there interpose to prevent any from returning to what is allowed to have been the primitive practice. I have heard some express their fears that your Presbytery and Synod would cut off both you and your people, from all connection with them, for presuming to dispense the Supper otherwise than is established by custom; and, if I am well informed, these fears weigh with some not to give their concurrence till they are satisfied on that head. For my own part, never dreaded any such thing.

M. Such fears are quite groundless; for no church court was ever yet guilty of such tyranny; and I am persuaded those with which

which we stand connected will not be the first to set such a precedent. The church of England is not singular in giving such toleration to her members; and indeed, how can any prohibit or censure in others, what they themselves own to be right and scriptural, tho' they may not think it proper to copy the example? Besides, such forbearance goes upon this principle, that every minister with his people have a right to do in such matters as they find just cause, and that no church authority can lawfully restrict them; because they are not restricted by the great Head. Such is the frequency recommended by the canons of that church, inculcated by many of her best writers, and exemplified by many of her members, that attempts to approach to the primitive practice in our national church of Scotland, have been branded and opposed by ignorant zealots, as verging towards episcopacy. Many are alarmed at mere names, who know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm; so little do they examine into the real grounds of what they practise in religion.

H. Since you have mentioned the church of Scotland, please let me hear how far her sentiments and practice, respecting the point in question, during what is called her reforming periods, accord with those of other reformed churches; for in these we have most interest, having adopted her standards as our own.

M. Her own standards and acts, together with what we have access to know of her practice at such periods, must determine that point. Before the year 1558, or 59, when the reformation took place, the fearers of the Lord could observe no stated times of communicating; for the few faithful ministers in the land were forced, by the persecution of the times, like the primitive Christians, to administer the word and ordinances in the fields, or in private houses, and often under cloud of night. In 1560, six ministers, of whom Mr. Knox was one, being enjoined by the great council of Scotland, drew up the first Book of Discipline, which all the first reformers signed, and which so many subsequent General assemblies seem to have regarded as binding on the church. This ordains, That the administration of the Lord's table should be four times in the year, which they desired to be distinguished, that the superstition of times might be avoided so far as possible. They add, "We do not deny, but any several kirk, for reasonable causes, may change the time, and may minister oftener." The General assembly held at Edinburgh in 1562, of which the famous John Knox was Moderator, enacted, "That the communion be ministered *four times* in the year within burrows, and *twice* in the year in the country parishes;" which shews the difficulty they found in bringing the people up even to that defective practice. It would appear from the acts of subsequent Assemblies, to promote a more frequent administration of the Supper, that betwixt 1600, and 1638, they had in general declined

clined in point of frequency; and how could it be otherwise, when the love of Christ could not constrain to the observance of this duty, which is at same time a distinguished privilege? for where that principle is felt, church courts need not interpose their authority, which is superfluous where Christ hath made his will known, and presuming when it differs from him.

H. But did no ministers of the Church of Scotland then exemplify a greater frequency? If they did, this shews in what sense they understood such laws, that they did not view them as a restriction, but as a stimulus to duty.

M. It appears evident, that the number of times specified, intended the least to which they gave public sanction; but that, notwithstanding these acts, any minister might dispense the Supper as often as he pleased: for Pardovan in his Collections, pag. 106, informs us, that at the very period referred to above, it was administered *once a month*, and refers for proof to the Old Discipline bound in with the old Psalms, and the forms for prayer in Mr Knox's time. And accordingly, in the Book of Common Order, received and used by the Reformed Kirk of Scotland, Chap. x. entitled, The manner of the Administration of the Lord's supper, I find the following introductory sentence; "The day when the Lord's supper is ministred, which is commonlie used *once a month*, or so oft as the Congregation shall think expedient, the minister useth to say as followeth." This plainly admits of a greater frequency than even once a month. In 1638, the General Assembly, to check the growing neglect of the ordinance, and promote frequency, thought proper to revert to the act of Assembly 1562, under which, it hath been shewn, that monthly communions were with approbation practised; tho' the letter of the act did not oblige to greater frequency than once a quarter. But I refer to such authorities, not that I deem them of any moment to establish our faith or practice, respecting the point in hand, having a more sure and authoritative word and example, to which we do well to give head; but because they serve to shew the opinion of our Reformers, whose judgment weighs so much with many, and from whose example, some think we are receding, in attempting to promote a more frequent administration.

H. As we profess to adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Catechisms Larger and Shorter, and the Directory for Public Worship, do they inculcate any thing respecting the frequent observance of the ordinance, or of week days as attached to its celebration? Some, I know, suppose that frequent communion, and without such days as are now generally observed, is contrary to the Confession of Faith, and to Presbyterian principles; whence they are led to oppose both, as favouring of another system.

M. Such a supposition is the result of not properly knowing either

either. In searching the Confession, on the chapter which treats of the Lord's supper, and the Larger Catechism upon the same subject, I find nothing said about the frequency of observing it, or of observing certain days in connection with it; tho' the Compilers are pretty full on the preparation necessary to its due observance. This appears to me a presumptive proof, that no such days were then in use, or, at least, that they did not deem them expedient. This however is obvious from the Directory for Public Worship, when purposely speaking of the administration of the Supper, the frequency of which they evidently inculcate. It enacts, or enjoins as follows; "The communion, or supper of the Lord, is *frequently* to be celebrated, and, when it shall be administered, we judge it convenient to be done after the morning sermon---Where this sacrament cannot, with convenience, be frequently administered, it is requisite that public warning be given the Sabbath day before the administration thereof; and that either then, or on some day of that week, something concerning that ordinance, and the due preparation thereunto, and participation thereof, be taught; that, by the diligent use of all means sanctified of God to that end, both in public and private, all may come better prepared to that heavenly feast." This paragraph plainly shews, that in the judgment of the Compilers of the Directory for Public Worship, and of the Church who received it as such, a public fast day, a Saturday and a Monday, were no way necessary, as a due preparation for, or, to the right observance of the ordinance; and that no such days were then in fact observed. What they accounted proper for the instruction of the people, they left entirely to the discretion of every minister, whether to deliver it at making the intimation, or upon any day of the communion week, which he might judge to be most convenient; and seem to think, that if it were frequently administered, even this might be superceded. Will any say, that these men were hostile to the Confession of Faith, or to Presbyterian church principles? And is there any reason to call in question on this head, the principles of the two worthy characters, to whose productions I own myself indebted in tracing the subject of our present investigation? The one lived and died a respected member of the church of Scotland, and the other is at present one of the oldest and brightest ornaments of which her communion can boast; and yet both have strenuously and successfully pleaded for the obligation of the apostolic and primitive example in this particular instance. But it is a small matter to be judged of man's judgment in such cases.

H. It appears from the passage you have quoted from the Directory for Public Worship, agreed upon by the Assembly at Westminster in 1643, and approved and established by an act of the General Assembly of the church of Scotland, and an act of

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Parliament,

Parliament, in 1645, as a part of the covenanted uniformity in religion throughout Britain and Ireland, that that Assembly were favourable to frequent communicating, and did not enjoin the observance of any working days in connection with the administration of the ordinance, which would render the frequent celebration of it impracticable. Is it known how often the members of that court might practise it in their own bounds?

M. As they did not all harmonize in their views of church government, so they might vary in their practice, if not in their sentiments, on that point. From the known piety of the ministers commissioned by the General Assembly of the church of Scotland, of whom Mr. Samuel Rutherford was one, there is reason to believe, they would wish to see something like the primitive practice revived. One of the authors referred to above says, "I have now in my custody manuscript memoirs of a private Christian, who lived in the time of the civil wars in England, who, I find, received the sacrament, with great profit, the first Lord's day of every month, at the meeting where Mr. Ash, a member of that Assembly, and Mr. Robrough, one of their scribes, were ministers: And that if any incident prevented the dispensing it the first Sabbath of the month, it was done, if possible, the next following." He also says, "I am well informed, that a great part of those who were ejected for non-conformity in Charles II.'s time, dispensed the *Supper monthly*." I recollect to have read in Doddridge's life of Colonel Gardiner, that his mother partook of the ordinance, in the congregation of which she was a member, once a month; at which times she laid the case of her son, then a profligate youth, with deep concern before the Lord.

H. As many pious people were banished from Britain to North America, in the times of persecution, and others emigrated to that asylum of the oppressed on a similar account, and as they conformed to the reformed churches at home, in respect of government, did they conform to them also, in regard to the Supper?

M. In Cotton Mather's account of the Discipline in the churches in New England, we are told, That they have no times universally stated for celebrating the Lord's supper;--that some have it once in four weeks, some in six, some in eight: some the first Lord's day of every kalendar month, and some the last. He also observes, that the pastors reserve to themselves a liberty of altering the times as they judge fit upon emergencies. That they give notice a week before-hand, that the Lord's supper is to be dispensed. That in most places there are held private meetings of Christians on some day of the week preparatory to the communion: And that it is a frequent thing for the pastor to be present at some or other of them; or else, perhaps, to hold a public lecture. There is not a word here of a public fast, or discourses on Saturday or Monday.

H. Can

H. Can you say what may be the present practice with Christians in these quarters, whether they are more zealous, or on the decline?

M. I cannot ascertain that, tho' I have some reason to believe, the practice is much the same as at the period referred to above. If true religion were revived, frequent communicating will follow of course; and I am happy to learn, that the Lord hath blessed the labours of some Baptist missionaries, among the Negroes in the West Indies, who in a church capacity receive that ordinance once a month†.

H. I rejoice to hear it, whoever be the instruments; for we should cordially wish success to all that love the Lord Jesus, in their laudable attempts to promote the honour of His name, and to spread the knowledge of his gospel. But as it would not be a duty to attempt to dispense the Supper once a month, or even once a quarter, as it is at present administered among us, can you ascertain the precise time when the observance of a public fast, a preparation Saturday, and a thanksgiving Monday, came to be stately attached to the administration of it, or what might give occasion to such services?

M. With regard to that, I cannot indeed be positive, having never seen the matter clearly ascertained; yet some of the known circumstances of the times, when these days were introduced, may lead to form a pretty accurate opinion respecting that point. If you please, however, we shall defer the consideration of this till, God willing, we have another opportunity; and, meanwhile, I beg leave to entertain you with some extracts from two authors who have already supplied us with some materials in the prosecution of our subject. These extracts I give, because I think they contain remarks exceedingly just in themselves, and naturally connected with the topics of our discourse.

H. Use your own discretion on that head, I submit the matter entirely to your judgment.

M. "So far then we see, says one of them, that the knowledge the Reformers had of this matter was agreeable to the

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Truth;

† The account of this we have in a late publication (by Mr. Pringle, Perth, pag. 115.) in a letter to a minister, dated, Kingston, Jamaica, May 18. 1792, of which the following is an extract. "Mr Green has called upon me, and very kindly offered his service to deliver a letter from me into your hands; he also advised me to send you a copy of our church covenant, which I have done; being a collection of some of the principal texts of scripture which we observe, both in America and this country, for the direction of our practice. It is read once a month here on sacrament-meetings, that our members may examine if they live according to those laws which they professed, and agreed to; by this means our church is kept in scriptural subjection. The chief part of our society are poor illiterate slaves, some living on sugar-estates, some on mountains, pens, and other settlements, that have no learning, no not to know so much as a letter in the book; but the reading this covenant once a-month, when all are met together from the different parts of the island, keeps them in mind of the commandments of God."

Truth; but in regard to their practice, here, alas! was the short coming; and here the too just opportunity given to others to proceed many steps beyond them; for altho' it may be indecent and rash to condemn these great men, who, in Providence, had the direction of the Reformation, for not conforming fully to the intention of the Lord, and their own sentiments about this ordinance, as they might have difficulties, not so easy to overcome, (even as we now find it difficult to bring things back to that imperfect example they gave us, tho', besides the higher argument from Scripture and antiquity, we have their authority and practice also, to which many profess so much regard, to enforce it;) yet who can abstain from regretting their defects, and joining in that censure passed by a learned English Dissenter on this occasion? *Our Reformers seem to have been guilty of a considerable oversight, that they laid aside the solitary or private Masses, without appointing public communion every Lord's day in the room of them. — The fault of the church of Rome was not in the frequency of the consecration, but in the priest's eating and drinking all himself after the consecration. I humbly conceive, it would have been much more prudent (he might have called it dutiful) to have retained the former, and only have laid aside the latter. And as the present Protestants have not advanced a step beyond the patterns given them at the Reformation, he adds, Is it not, if we may speak impartially, a shame and a scandal that the Supper should, in some places, be administered once a month, in others once in six weeks, or two months, in others only three times, and in others only once a year? and, may we not add, in some places scarce once in two years? How very different is this from the practice of the primitive church?"*

Having quoted a number of Acts of Assembly enforcing frequent communicating, he adds,—"From these you must observe the sentiments of our Reformers, agreeing with their foreign Brethren, quite different indeed from what obtains among us; wherein, without any infringement on truth, we may certainly say, that we have not improved upon our Fathers, but rather have gone far backward.—That we have fallen from all these (even imperfect) examples and appointments of our predecessors in religion, only verifies the just observation, which wise men have made on all churches, to wit, that in them, *what is left behind in the first settlements, is rarely if ever afterwards attained.* For besides what may be justly said about the righteous judgment of God, in not restoring opportunities of well-doing, when once given, they have been neglected or abused; there are many deceitful, sinful principles in man tending not to come nearer to the truth, but rather to degenerate from the spirit of their reforming Fathers.—Thus an old Puritan emphatically complains, *For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the reformed churches, who are come to a period in religion, and will go at present*

no farther than the instruments of their Reformation. The Luther-ans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw. Whatever part of his will our God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it; and the Calvinists stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things.—The posterity of Reformers sit often down on what their Fathers attained, as *their* work, which their pride therefore will maintain, that it may be called *theirs*. As pride hindered those they separated from, in Reformation, from forsaking their errors, because their Fathers were in them: And in this unhappy view, you see, even the profession of the truth itself may be stained in some that make it, by their calling men on earth *Rabbi* therein, receiving from them as the word of men, rather than from the Scriptures, as it is in truth the word of God." I wish there may not be too much justice in these remarks, severe as they may be thought.

H. I venture indeed to say there is; for I have lately had occasion to converse with some, who would be thought no mean proficient in Christianity, who drew their arguments, against the practice of late introduced in your Congregation, from these very topics. Tho' I have had, and may still have in part, my prejudices or difficulties about the propriety of that practice in present circumstances; yet I could not help telling them, that if they had lived in the apostles days, acting upon their present principles, they would be dissenters from them, and that if they had lived at the reformation from Popery, they would doubtless cleave to the church of Rome, which could plead immemorial custom for her usages, the canons and dogmas of renowned councils, and the opinion of many a famous Doctor, besides the practice of their friends and forefathers. But if we cannot give a better reason for our opposition to, or falling in with any practice, than these, and the like, we should be silent.

M. The other extract I had in view, and with which I meant to shut up our conversation at the time, being rather long, I fear you may think me tedious.

H. While my benefit and satisfaction are your object, I can have no just cause for so thinking; I beg you will let me hear what you farther intended, especially as you told me it was connected with the subject in hand.

M. The extract respects the attempts made to restore frequent and full Communion at the Reformation, and runs thus: "Some attempt was made by the first Reformers to rectify abuses, and restore frequent and general Communion in many places. And they happily carried their point so far as to abolish private Masses: but the restoring the antient way of the whole church's communicating every Lord's day, was a matter not so easy to be effected; partly by reason of the prejudices which men had imbibed by the prevalency and long duration of contrary custom;

tom; and partly by reason of that affection which men retain for their vices, which will not suffer them to comply with an institution, that requires a constant purity of soul, and a conscience always void of offence, to qualify them for a worthy reception of a weekly communion. *Calvin* laboured hard at his first coming to *Geneva* to establish a monthly or a weekly communion, as most agreeable to the practice of the apostles and the primitive church. He pleads earnestly for it in his *Institutions*, where he censures the Popish custom of communicating only once a year, as most certainly the invention of the Devil."

Observing that the *French* church required in her Discipline no more than communicating four times a year, tho' they encouraged more frequent reception, he adds, "The *Church of England* was a little happier in her attempts of this kind. For tho' her rules require the people in general to receive but three times a year, as of necessary ecclesiastical obligation; yet in our Cathedral churches the Eucharist is ordinarily celebrated every Lord's day; as it is also in some of the London parish-churches; and others both in city and country have monthly communions. Yet there remains, adds he, a great deal still to be done, to bring this matter to the primitive standard. For even in our Cathedrals the Communion is very thin, and there is still room for those complaints of *Chrysostom*. In vain do we stand at the altar, in vain is the daily sacrifice offered, there are none, in a manner, that communicate. The churches are crowded to hear the sermon, but when the time of the holy mysteries comes, they are empty and deserted. Men are earnest to hear their fellow-servant preach an eloquent discourse, but when Christ the common Lord and Master of all is ready to appear, and entertain them, they fly, tho' ever so kindly invited, from his table. This must needs grieve the hearts of all pious servants of Christ, who stand there to minister in his name, whilst few hearken to their admonitions, and the generality excuse themselves from communicating, as if it were no Christian duty. And in country parishes the matter is still more deplorable, where the despair of success deters the ministers from attempting it. For here men are generally so averse to a weekly communion, that they will not be prevailed upon with all the serious exhortations that can be used, to comply with the standing rules of the church, which oblige them to communicate three times a year, tho' the minister himself be under an obligation to present every such non-communicant as a notorious delinquent. But if the foundations be cast down, what can the righteous do? Experience tells us, it is as much labour in vain to present a negligent people for not communicating three times a year, as it is gravely to exhort them to a weekly communion. This discouragement which ministers commonly meet with, in trying to bring men to comply with the stated rules of communicating

three

three times a year by Church-censures, which are wholly neglected, makes them despair of going any higher towards the perfection of the primitive practice: Since they who cannot be prevailed upon by the present discipline to communicate three times a year, are too obstinate and stubborn to hearken to any the most serious admonitions that can be used to incline them to a weekly communion.

What effectual remedy can be applied to this inveterate disease, is not easy to determine. Yet certainly the regaining of that which was the glory of the primitive church, and the great support of Christian piety (as frequent weekly communion most certainly was) must be a thing worthy the most serious consideration of all those, into whose hands God has put authority to redress abuses. If I were worthy to give any advice in the case, it should be this, First to restore the practice of the true *scripture* discipline, and after that the way would lie open to revive the practice of the true primitive way of communicating *every Lord's day*. But it will be said, there lies an insuperable difficulty against the restoration of such discipline in the present posture of affairs. The state of the present times, and the general corruption of mens morals, will not admit of it. The church of England has for two hundred years wished for the restoration of this discipline, and yet it is but an ineffective wish; for nothing is done towards introducing it, but rather things are gone backward, and there is less discipline for this last sixty years, since the times of the unhappy confusions, than there was before. To which it may be answered, That the difficulty is certainly great, but not insuperable: For discipline is one of God's ordinances in his church, and he appoints nothing but what is practicable in itself, if men be not wanting on their part to contribute toward the exercise of it. But to give rules in this case is a nice and tender point, and I had rather it should be done by the wisdom of others than myself." Bingham's Antiquities of the Christian church. That I might not interrupt the connection, I have retained a few sentences that were given before.

H. I see that the observations respect the church of England, but, no doubt, they may apply to other churches; and what the author says of discipline, is necessary to be attended to by all, would they retain their communion pure, and promote Christian edification. Wilhing I may be enabled to profit by your past kind attention, I shall defer soliciting the farther continuance of it till in Providence I have another opportunity. Meantime may every good thing attend you, and the Lord reward all your labours of love!

M. May he send forth his light and his truth, to lead and guide us, and to bring us to his holy hill!--May we be willing meekly and humbly to learn of him, and receive the law from his mouth!

—And

And if our eye be thus single, our whole body shall be full of light. Farewell at the time.

N.B. The Author thought, when he put this Publication to press, that it might be comprised in a pamphlet of about 70 pages, the price of which he fixed on title page at 6d. the second paper, and 8d. the fine, to encourage its circulation among the poorer sort, who may be supposed most to need instruction upon such a topic. Desirous however to enrich the tract, by a number of valuable extracts, and unwilling to suppress any thing that might tend to ascertain the great object in view, he finds that his materials, when connected, have extended much beyond what he at first supposed, not having more than the Sermon transcribed when it was put to press. This obliged him to procure more paper than was at first thought necessary, till it has increased to more than double the size of pamphlets usually sold at the same price. As the tract has been impatiently expected by his own people, for whose use it was primarily intended, and by others who had access to know it was in a state of forwardness, he suffers it to come abroad in its present state, till he can procure supply of paper, &c. to complete the plan which he had at first intended.

Tho' a number of objections have been adverted to in the progress of the work, yet as he meant to answer particularly such as are usually urged against the plan recommended, or that have occurred to himself upon reflexion, towards the close of the tract, he proposes to publish this, so soon as convenient, in a separate Dialogue or two, as a continuation, that the doubts and scruples which some well-disposed people entertain, against the propriety of the measure, may be the more effectually removed. To this is meant to be added a few strictures on Offences, &c. with a chapter from a celebrated treatise of the learned Oftervald, in which The Want of Discipline is shewn to be a great Cause of the present Corruption of Christians, an evil which needs much to be remedied in the present day.

The Reader cannot in reason expect, that this Addition should be given without any increase of price, as he will have 104 pages for the sum fixed on title page, independent of it; which, considering the late great advance on printing paper, is more than double the quantity usually given at the same price. The Author will therefore be obliged to charge for the Supplement, that he may not materially hurt himself, besides giving his labour without any compensation, a sacrifice which no candid person will expect; but this will likewise be made as moderate as possible. Those who happen to be gratified by the perusal of what is already published, will not neglect to procure the Addition, which will follow with all convenient speed. It is proper to advert, that as the price affixed is so very low, it cannot afford the allowance usually made to Booksellers, and therefore such as incline to take the trouble of disposing of any number of copies, from desire to see the plan in view reduced into practice, will be so good as write the Author for that purpose. Christians of all denominations, if they view the matter aright, have an interest in the success of the attempt; and it is hoped, many among them will be induced to take an active part in promoting the circulation of a Tract, that may facilitate, thro' the Divine blessing, the restoration of this important branch of primitive Christianity; an object which the Author hath had for years much at heart, and which actuates him in the present Publication.